



Attack Suspected as North Korean Internet Collapses

Members of the Security Council vote in favor of putting North Korea's human rights situation on the council's agenda during a meeting on Monday, Dec. 22, 2014 at United Nations headquarters. North Korea's links to the Internet went completely dark Monday after days of instability, in what Internet monitors described as one of the worst North Korean network failures in years. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II)

Page 3

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Attack suspected as North Korean internet collapses

DAVID E. SANGER
NICOLE PERLROTH

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SAN FRANCISCO - North Korea's already tenuous links to the Internet went completely dark Monday after days of instability, in what Internet monitors described as one of the worst North Korean network failures in years.

The loss of service came just days after President Barack Obama pledged that the United States would launch a "proportional response" to the recent attacks on Sony Pictures, which government officials have linked to North Korea. While an attack on North Korea's networks was suspected, there was no definitive evidence of it.

The U.N. Security Council also took up the issue of North Korea's bleak human rights situation for the first time Monday, a ground-

breaking step toward possibly holding the nuclear-armed but desperately poor country and leader Kim Jong Un accountable for alleged crimes against humanity. North Korea quickly denounced the move.

Doug Madory, the director of Internet analysis at Dyn Research, an Internet performance management company, said that North Korean Internet access first became unstable late Friday. The situation worsened over the weekend, and by Monday, North Korea's Internet was completely offline.

"Their networks are under duress," Madory said. "This is consistent with a DDoS attack on their routers," he said, referring to a distributed denial of service attack, in which attackers flood a network with traffic until it collapses under the load.



In this photo, North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un waves in Pyongyang, North Korea. North Korea's links to the Internet went completely dark Monday after days of instability, in what Internet monitors described as one of the worst North Korean network failures in years.

(AP Photo/Wong Maye-E)

North Korea does very little commercial or government business over the Internet. The country officially has 1,024 Internet protocol addresses, although the actual number may be somewhat higher. By comparison, the United States has billions of addresses.

North Korea's addresses are managed by Star Joint Venture, the state-run Internet provider, which routes many of those connections through China Unicom, China's state-owned telecommunications company. By Monday morning, those

addresses had gone dark for over an hour.

The failure follows requests by the Obama administration to China seeking its help in blocking North Korea's ability to wage cyberattacks, an early step toward the "proportional response" that Obama promised, as well as a broader warning to others who may try similar attacks on U.S. targets in the future, senior administration officials have said.

If the attack was American in origin - something the United States would probably never acknowledge - it would be a rare effort by the United States to attack a nation's Internet connections.

Until now, most operations by the United States have amounted to cyberespionage, mostly to collect defense information or the communications of terrorism suspects. □

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New York City:

Mayor de Blasio says no protests until after funerals

JONATHAN LEMIRE
COLLEEN LONG
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio called Monday for a pause in protests over police conduct as he faced a widening rift with those in a grieving force who accuse him of creating a climate of mistrust that contributed to the execution of two officers. De Blasio's relations with the

city's police unions have tumbled to an extraordinary new low — one not experienced by a mayor in the nation's largest city in more than a generation — in the aftermath of Saturday's shooting which the gunman claimed was retaliation for the deaths of black men at the hands of white police. In a display of defiance, dozens of police officers turned their backs

to de Blasio at the hospital where the officers died, and union leaders said the mayor had "blood on his hands" for enabling the protesters who have swept the streets of New York this month since a grand jury declined to indict an officer in the chokehold death of Eric Garner.

"I think it's important that, regardless of people's viewpoints, that everyone



New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, second from left, and Police Commissioner Bill Bratton, left, talk with police officers after a news conference at police headquarters in New York, Monday, Dec. 22, 2014. De Blasio called Monday for a pause in protests over police conduct as he faced a widening rift with those in a grieving force who accuse him of creating a climate of mistrust that contributed to the execution of two officers.

(AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

step back," de Blasio said in a speech Monday at the Police Athletic League. "I think it's a time for everyone to put aside political debates, put aside protests, put aside all of the things that we will talk about in all due time."

De Blasio, in his first extensive remarks since the killings, called for "everyone to put aside political debates, put aside protests, put aside all of the things that we will talk about in all due time."

Officers Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos were ambushed Saturday afternoon by a 28-year-old who vowed in an Instagram post that he would put "wings on pigs." The suspect, Ishmaaiyl Brinsley was black; the slain New York Police Department officers were Hispanic and Asian.

The killings came as police nationwide are being criticized following Garner's death and 18-year-old Michael Brown's fatal shooting in Ferguson, Missouri. Protests erupted after grand juries declined to charge officers in either case.

On Monday, a prosecutor said a white Milwaukee po-

lice officer who was fired after he fatally shot a mentally ill black man in April won't face criminal charges. Lawyers for the slain man's family urged any protesters there to be peaceful.

De Blasio said it was time to focus on the officers' grieving families. He and Police Commissioner William Bratton met with them earlier Monday.

"There's a lot of pain. It's so hard to make sense of it — how one deeply troubled, violent individual could do this to these good families," a somber de Blasio said. "And I think it's a time for everyone to take stock that there are things that unite us, there are things that we hold dear as New Yorkers, as Americans."

Investigators said Brinsley was a bystander during a protest two days before the Garner grand jury decision but had not participated. It remained unclear if Brinsley simply latched onto the cause for the final act in a violent rampage that began Saturday morning in Baltimore when he shot his ex-girlfriend in the stomach. □



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Ex-officer not charged in fatal Milwaukee shooting

TODD RICHMOND

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — A white police officer fired after fatally shooting a mentally ill black man in April won't face criminal charges, prosecutors said Monday, while the U.S. attorney said hours later that there will be a federal investigation of the case.

Christopher Manney won't be charged because he shot Dontre Hamilton in self-defense, authorities said. Manney is at least the third white police officer to avoid charges in the past month after a confrontation that led to a black man's death, including cases in Ferguson, Missouri, and New York City.

"Based on all the evidence and analysis presented in this report, I come to the conclusion that Officer Manney's use of force in this incident was justified self-defense and that defense cannot be reasonably overcome to establish a basis to charge Officer Manney with a crime," Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm said in a statement.

After waiting eight months for the decision, Hamilton's family reacted with disappointment and anger. At an emotional news conference on the steps of the federal courthouse, family attorneys said they had called for a federal investigation. They also urged that protests be peaceful

"so as not to dishonor Dontre's name and the Hamilton family name."

But Hamilton's brother Nate spoke bitterly, saying the family had "cried too long" and "we don't have to be the voice of reason." "We need to take our communities back. We need to protect each other. We need to stop the violence in our communities so we can get rid of these pigs that kill us," he said, using a derogatory term for police. His remarks came just two days after two New York City police officers were ambushed in their patrol car. Police said that attack was carried out by a man who posted online about putting "wings on pigs."

Jon Safran, a Hamilton family attorney, later said Nate Hamilton doesn't condone "any type of violence" and that the family was dealing with "great anxiety and



Protestors march in Milwaukee Monday, Dec. 22, 2014 after authorities announced a white Milwaukee police officer who fatally shot a mentally ill black man in April won't face criminal charges. Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm said Christopher Manney won't be charged because he shot Dontre Hamilton in self-defense. (AP Photo/Carrie Antlfinger)

frustration right now." Hamilton's family said he suffered from schizophrenia and had recently stopped taking his medication.

About eight hours after Chisholm announced his decision, U.S. Attorney James Santelle said the Department of Justice, along with

his office and the FBI, will conduct a review to determine if there was a violation of federal civil rights law. □

Ex-headmaster guilty in US child porn case

RANDALL CHASE

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Delaware (AP) — The former headmaster of an elite prep school faces at least 50 years in prison after being convicted Monday of dealing in child pornography.

Christopher Wheeler, 54, was found guilty on all 25 counts. Wheeler is a former headmaster at Tower Hill school in Delaware, where

he was paid more than \$300,000 a year and where tuition exceeds \$25,000 a year. Graduates of the school, founded by members of the du Pont family, include DuPont Co. CEO Ellen Kullman, U.S. Sen. Chris Coons and television personality Dr. Oz. Superior Court Judge Eric Davis said the evidence showed Wheeler sought out and downloaded images of child porn.

Wheeler waived his right to a jury trial after the judge denied a defense motion to suppress evidence seized by police.

Wheeler showed no emotion as Davis read from a lengthy opinion. The judge tentatively set Wheeler's sentencing for March. Each count carries a minimum two-year prison term. Defense attorney Tom Foley said he planned to appeal.

Wheeler resigned from Tower Hill in October 2013 and has remained behind bars in lieu of \$1.5 million cash bail since his arrest.

Wheeler, an accomplished musician and composer who flew his own airplane, was hired as headmaster at Tower Hill in late 2004 after 14 years at Lake Forest Academy near Chicago, where he was assistant headmaster and wrestling coach. □



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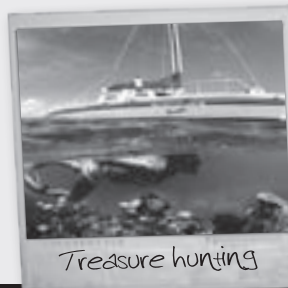


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Judge skeptical of challenge to Obama immigration plan



Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio speaks with the media in Phoenix. A U.S. judge on Monday appeared deeply skeptical of a lawsuit by Arpaio in the border state of Arizona seeking to halt President Barack Obama's plan to spare nearly 5 million people from deportation.

(AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

SAM HANANEL

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S.

judge on Monday appeared deeply skeptical of a lawsuit by a sheriff in the border state of Arizona seeking to halt President Barack Obama's plan to spare nearly 5 million people from deportation.

District Judge Beryl Howell questioned whether Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio had legal standing to challenge the immigration program announced last month. She suggested the topic is better left for Congress and the Obama administration to sort out.

In the first courtroom battle over Obama's plan, Arpaio's lawyer Larry Klayman said the president violated the Constitution by doing an end-run around Congress. He argued that the program would let more illegal immigrants enter the country and commit crimes, burdening law enforcement.

"It's not policy, he's creating law and he cannot do that under the U.S. Constitution," Klayman said of Obama.

But Justice Department lawyer Kathleen Hartnett said Arpaio's lawsuit seemed to be raising a "political dispute" rather than a legal claim the court could address. The Obama administration has called the case "speculative and unsubstantiated" and has urged the court to dismiss it. Howell at times seemed exasperated with Klayman, a longtime conservative activist who has filed hundreds of lawsuits against the federal government, including challenges to Obama's U.S. citizenship. When Klayman said his client has been threatened because of his tough views on Obama's immigration

policy, Howell responded: "That just doesn't cut it for me."

Howell, an Obama appointee, also said it did not appear that Arpaio could show a "concrete" injury he has suffered from the new policy, especially since it will take months before the bulk of it actually goes into effect.

Howell said she would issue a ruling in the case soon.

Arpaio has often clashed with the federal government over the enforcement of immigration laws and he has filed suit to stop new policies announced by Obama. He claims that more than 35 percent of immigrants living in Maricopa County illegally who wound up in Arpaio's jails in 2014 were repeat offenders, signifying in the sheriff's view that federal officials have done a poor job of deporting criminals.

Obama's plan marks the most sweeping change to the nation's immigration policies in nearly three decades and set off a fierce fight with Republicans.

The changes include work permits and three-year deportation stays for more than 4 million immigrants here illegally.

It mostly applies to those who've been in the country more than five years and have children who are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents.

Under the program, the Homeland Security Department would prioritize the removal of immigrants who present threats to national security, public safety or border security. DHS officials could deport someone if an Immigration and Customs Enforcement field office director determined that removing the person would serve an important federal interest.



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US Financial Front:

American home sales hit slowest pace in 6 months

JOSH BOAK

AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fewer Americans bought homes in November as buying slid to its slowest pace in six months. The National Association of Realtors said Monday that sales of existing homes fell 6.1 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.93 million. That was down from a revised annual pace of 5.26 million in October. Over the past 12 months, sales have risen 2.1 percent.

The combination of higher home prices and relatively stagnant incomes has reduced affordability and restrained buying. A recent decline in mortgage rates has yet to lure more buyers into the market. At the same time, fewer distressed properties and bargains, which tend to attract investors, are coming onto the market.

The Realtors estimate that 2014 sales will end up below 2013 levels. Sales have slumped much of this year after a three-year rally that followed the recession and the implosion of the housing market. Harsh winter weather crippled home buying at the start of 2014. Lower affordability, resulting from tight credit, rising home prices and essentially flat incomes, held back sales for the rest of the year.

The Realtors have estimated that 4.94 million existing homes will be sold this year, down 3 percent from 5.09 million in 2013. Analysts say sales of roughly 5.5 million existing homes are common in a healthy real estate market. The median price rose 5 percent over the past 12 months to \$205,300. That's a positive for owners looking to sell, though it creates an additional challenge for would-be buyers.

The share of first-time buyers climbed to 31 percent last

month from a recent average of 29 percent. Still, that's well below the 40 percent share that has been historically common. The modest percentage of first-time buyers is a sign that affordability remains an obstacle for many who would like to purchase but lack the savings or credit record to do so.

November sales fell in all four major geographic regions: Northeast, Midwest, South and West. Buying activity fell over the past 12 months for homes worth less than \$250,000. A sudden blast of cold weather and snowstorms at the end of November might have cut into sales, noted Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. This November was the coldest since 2000, contributing to the slowest annualized sales pace since May. The supply of homes for sale also fell from October. There were 2.09 million homes listed for sale in November, down 6.7 percent from the prior month.

Some of the weakness in sales has resulted from a healthier market. Just 9 percent of sales last month were due to foreclosures and short sales, compared with 14 percent last year. The share of purchases by investors was 15 percent in November, compared with 19 percent 12 months ago. This indicates that the market continues to recover from the housing bust, despite the absence of sales growth.

There are signs that sales may improve in 2015. Mortgage rates have fallen sharply in the past few weeks, which should make homes more affordable. The average rate for a 30-year fixed mortgage dropped last week to 3.8 percent, from 3.93 percent the previ-



This photo shows a house for sale in Los Angeles. The National Association of Realtors reported on sales of existing homes in November on Monday, Dec. 22, 2014. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel)

ous week. That was the lowest level since May 2013. Rates have fallen as investors have plowed their money into 10-year U.S. Treasury notes, after being spooked by plummeting oil prices and signs of slowing growth overseas that make lower risk investments more at-

tractive. At the same time, consistent job growth has lowered the unemployment rate to 5.8 percent from 7 percent 12 months ago. Steady hiring should eventually boost pay at a pace meaningfully above inflation, which would help boost home sales. Sales may

also pick up as the housing market continues to heal from its boom-and-bust last decade. Real estate data provider Zillow said last week that the proportion of U.S. homeowners with mortgages who are "under water" — meaning they owe more than their house is worth — has fallen by almost half in the past two years.

Rising prices and foreclosures have reduced that figure. As more homeowners gain equity in their homes, they are more likely to list their homes for sale, keeping home prices in check and spurring more sales. Stan Humphries, Zillow's chief economist, forecasts that sales of existing homes will rise to 5.2 million next year from just under 5 million in 2014. □

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American Living:

Despite cheaper gas, US public transit ridership is up

JON HURDLE

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PHILADELPHIA - David Needham thought he would need to buy a car when he moved to Minneapolis-St. Paul from San Francisco in February 2013, but was pleasantly surprised to find that his adopted city has an extended transit system that meets all of his business and social needs, allowing him and his family to remain car-free. Needham, 29, a website developer for nonprofits and small businesses, lives a five-minute walk from a new light-rail system that runs every 10 minutes and takes him into downtown Minneapolis in about 30 minutes for a fare of about \$2.

"When we moved here to St. Paul, we realized that we lived on the route of a new light-rail system and a major bus thoroughfare, and we really didn't need a vehicle," Needham said. He said he, his wife Alycia, and their 18-month-old daughter have been without a car for about a year. Needham rides the 11-mile Green Line, which since opening in June has attracted around 36,000 riders on a typical weekday, a number that is already approaching the 41,000 projected for the line by 2030, said Drew Kerr, a spokesman for Metro Transit, the city's transportation agency. The line cost \$957 million to build, half of which was funded by the federal government, Kerr said.

Riders like Needham get

a lot of value from public transportation, as do people in many other cities where investment in transit

Chicago and New York, all of which reported annual increases in the number of riders for the both the latest

relationship is unraveling as transit services improve, Melaniphy said. The latest evidence of a

dates on transit services.

In Philadelphia, transit rider Kara Sarvey takes commuter rail to her job downtown from her home in suburban Conshohocken, about 15 miles from the city center, and said she never considered driving to work, although she does own a car.

Sarvey, 26, a marketing professional for a publisher of medical textbooks, said that taking the train operated by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority saves her both money and time compared with driving along a notoriously congested highway.

"It was never even a thought to drive to work," she said. "I just would not want to be in jam-packed traffic every day."

In Boston, where transit ridership rose to a record-high 37.2 million passenger trips in October despite a 5 percent fare increase three months earlier, the use of buses, trains and subways partly reflects improvements to the existing system rather than additions to it, said Beverly Scott, chief executive of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

Upgrades, costing about \$1 billion over the last two years, have included the start in March of late-night services on Fridays and Saturdays, the rehabilitation of some commuter rail stations, and the availability of mobile tickets that can be activated through riders' cellphones, Scott said. □



Ibsa Idris, a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota who is originally from Ethiopia, rides a Green Line train into downtown Minneapolis. Investment in transit around the country is leading to record-high ridership rates and more people leaving their cars at home despite low prices at the pump.

(Todd Heisler/The New York Times)

is leading to record-high ridership rates and persuading more people to leave their cars at home despite the latest plunge in gasoline prices.

The American Public Transportation Association said Wednesday that about 2.7 billion passenger trips were taken on transit systems in the third quarter of 2014 - an increase of 1.8 percent, or about 48 million trips, over the year-ago period - the highest third-quarter number since the trade group's records began in 1974. Cities with increased ridership include San Francisco,

quarter and the first nine months of 2014.

The national increase, which follows a 57-year high in ridership for all of 2013, reflects improvements in the reach, trip-frequency and quality of public transportation, and weakens a traditional link between gas prices and transit use, said Michael Melaniphy, president of the association.

While previous spikes in transit use resulted from increased gasoline prices, and people would typically get back in their cars when gas prices retreated, that

break in the link is an increase in ridership at a time when retail gasoline prices have fallen to their lowest in more than four years, he said. "People are saying, 'I came because of fuel prices; I'm staying because of the experience,'" he said. With 60 percent of transit trips made by people commuting to work, the increased ridership is also fueled by a strengthening economic recovery that generates more jobs, and by improvements such as more frequent service and the availability of apps that offer users real-time up-



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Leaders agree on Ukrainian peace talks this week

V. ISACHENKOV
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany on Monday reached an agreement to call another round of Ukraine peace talks this week, the latest attempt to negotiate a settlement to the conflict that has badly strained the ties between Russia and the West. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Vladimir Putin of Russia, French President Francois Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed during a conference call to convene the talks that would involve negotiators from Ukraine, Russia, pro-Russian rebels and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Poroshenko's office said the negotiations will be held in the Belarusian capital Minsk on Wednesday and Friday. The four leaders agreed to talk again in a few days, it said.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine between government forces and pro-Russia separatists has killed more than 4,700 people, according to the United Nations. Ukraine and the West have accused Moscow of fueling the rebellion with troops and weapons — the accusations Moscow has denied. Previous rounds of Minsk talks between the parties in September produced a ceasefire deal which has often been violated. Recent peace efforts have helped sharply reduce hostilities, but the conflicting parties have been unable to agree on terms for the pullout of heavy weapons and prisoners exchange. The German government said in a statement that the four leaders agreed that implementation of the Minsk agreement needs to be moved forward urgently and discussed "concrete proposals for solutions," in particular regarding the



Russian President Vladimir Putin, right, and Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev shake hands during their meeting in Moscow, Russia, Monday, Dec. 22, 2014. Nursultan Nazarbayev's comments Monday, after a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, could carry weight because Kazakhstan is part of a Russia-dominated trade bloc that Moscow sees as a counterweight to the European Union.

(AP Photo/Alexei Druzhinin)

Russia bails out bank; ruble slides

NATALIYA VASILYEVA
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia has bailed out a mid-sized bank for about \$500 million to save it from bankruptcy — a clear sign that the slide in the value of the ruble in the wake of falling oil prices is straining the banking system. The Central Bank said Monday that it will provide a 30-billion ruble loan to help the Trust Bank to continue operating as normal. It will also place Trust Bank under its own supervision until it finds an investor. Major Russian banks said they had no interest in acquiring Trust, a top 30 Russian bank with about \$5 billion in assets. The problems afflicting

Trust Bank follow a tumultuous period for the ruble, which this year has shared the title of the world's worst performing currency with the Ukrainian hryvnia. President Vladimir Putin acknowledged Monday that the Russian economy is facing "uneasy times," but vowed that the country has enough resources to overcome the problems. Earlier, a respected former Russian finance minister warned that the country is headed for "a full-blown economic crisis." The ruble has lost about half of its value this year, pushed down by slumping oil prices and Western sanctions over Moscow's course on Ukraine. Last week, its descent gath-

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Spain hands out \$3B in planet's biggest lottery

ALAN CLENDENNING
Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Spaniards and Latin American immigrants who bought lottery

as they celebrated winning 400,000-euro (\$490,000) payoffs from a 2.5 billion-euro (\$3 billion) pot of cash divided among thousands

purchased in the southern city of Cadiz and a handful were sold in other cities across the nation. Restaurant employee Joa-

years ago.

"The first thing I'll do is take my 5-year-old daughter to the Disney theme park in Paris," said Lizcano, 28.

those who landed the most winning tickets, along with employees of the nearby Madrid Wax Museum.

Unlike lotteries that offer one large jackpot or just a few big winning tickets, Spain's Christmas season "El Gordo" (The Fat One) lottery distributes prizes to thousands of people, with other winning tickets shelling out tens of thousands or hundreds of euros.

It's the world's richest lottery and Spaniards were glued to televisions as awards were announced in a drawing program that lasted four hours. Before Spain's economic implosion in 2008, winners often splurged on new cars, beach homes or vacations. Now many use winnings to pay off debt. Photocopy shop manager Arturo Aguirre said his winning ticket would allow him to buy his way out of the debt he racked up amid the crisis that started easing this year, but still hasn't translated into a major financial turnaround for many Spaniards. "I'll be able to plug the holes that I've got," Aguirre said. □



Workers from the Wax Museum celebrate after they won the main Christmas lottery prize in Madrid, Spain, Monday, Dec. 22, 2014. Billed as the world's richest lottery, the top prize for this year's "El Gordo" (The Fat One) drawing are tickets that will win 400,000 euros (\$490,000). Many more people who bought 20 euro (\$24) tickets will take home smaller amounts. Unlike lotteries that offer one large jackpot, Spain's Christmas season drawing sprinkles a variety of winnings to thousands more. Before Spain's economic implosion in 2008, winners often splurged on new cars, beach homes or vacations. Now many use winnings to pay off debt.

(AP Photo/Paul White)

tickets in an upper middle class Madrid neighborhood hit the jackpot on Monday, cracking open bottles of champagne on the streets

of ticketholders.

More than 100 of the top winning tickets were sold in the downtown neighborhood, though 20 were also

na Lizcano beamed as she soaked in the reality of winning the big one after coming to Spain from Colombia as a poor immigrant 14

"Then I'll pay the debts I have and try to buy an apartment with my husband." The workers at her restaurant were among

China to investigate ex-President Hu Jintao's top aide

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The top aide to former Chinese President Hu Jintao has been placed under investigation for unspecified disciplinary violations, the official Xinhua News Agency said Monday, in a sign that President Xi Jinping is removing his predecessor's influences while consolidating his power.

The evening announcement came two years after the former aide, Ling Jihua, fell out of political favor when a lurid scandal involving his alleged cover-up of his son's death in a speeding Ferrari disrupted his political ascent. But Ling returned to the public eye this year when authorities put his two brothers — one a politician

in the coal-rich northern province of Shanxi and the other a businessman — under investigation, triggering speculation that Ling too would be implicated under Xi's widening anti-corruption campaign. The campaign is seen by many as a means to not only restore public confidence in the ruling Communist Party, but also to root out threats

to Xi's political dominance. Already, Xi has removed Bo Xilai, a former Politburo member, after imprisoning him for life on corruption charges. In early December, authorities arrested Zhou Yongkang, a former member of the Politburo's powerful Standing Committee, on charges ranging from adultery and bribery to leaking state secrets.

Both Bo and Zhou were seen as challengers to Xi's power. Now, the latest to fall is Ling, Hu's former right-hand man. Although it is unclear whether Ling, 58, will be put on trial, the announcement of the investigation all but means the end of his political career, because the top leadership has likely already determined his fate. □

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Big changes coming to Cuba tourism with US opening

BEN FOX

Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — U.S. tourists are roaming the streets of Old Havana, listening to lectures on Art Deco architecture and meeting with jazz musicians. What they aren't doing yet — at least most of the time — is lounging in the sun and sipping mojitos at white-sand-beach resorts.

American citizens have been allowed to visit Cuba on such "people to people" trips since 2011, one of President Barack Obama's first moves toward detente with the communist-run island — provided their scheduled activities are sufficiently educational, and down time is kept to a minimum.

Now, such cultural exchanges are not only expected to grow dramatically, they are expected to become more flexible and less bureaucratic following last week's announcement by Cuba and the U.S. that they would work to restore normal diplomatic relations for the first time in more than 50 years.

President Barack Obama has said the U.S. is easing the rules on visiting Cuba, and that will mean major changes for the trips, which are currently so tightly regulated that operators must submit extensive documentation to the Treasury Department, including detailed justification for all activities to prove they are sufficiently educational, and keep down time to a minimum. Such tours also can cost as much as a good used car back home. For Americans who don't have family on the island or fit into one of the handful of other categories for legal visits, the trips have been the only way to visit the island. General tourism to Cuba is still prohibited by

the half-century old trade embargo, and it would take an act of Congress to lift it.

"We can't go to the beach and drink mojitos all day," said Tony Pandola, who was leading an eight-day trip to the island this week with Global Expeditions of San Francisco, California, that included a guided architecture tour of Havana. The new Treasury Department rules have not yet been released, but a White House statement suggests that educational travel to Cuba will now be covered by a "general license," which means tour operators — and perhaps individuals, depending on how the regulations are written — will be able to head to Cuba and simply give the U.S. government their word that they're not engaging in ordinary tourism.

Travelers may simply have to sign a form and board a charter flight, making it easier and cheaper to visit the island, experts say.

"As long as, with integrity, they can say they're going to engage with the Cuban people and learn about Cuba and talk about the United States then they don't have to do anything other than say that's what they're doing," said John McAuliff, executive director of the Fund for Reconciliation and Development, which has organized trips in the past.

The changes should add some flexibility to trips that tend to be pretty wonky, less of a sun-and-sand vacation and more like a seminar. Jonathan Anderson, a 33-year-old from Denver on the Global Expeditions tour was spending a sunny Sunday morning in Havana on an architecture tour, attended a dance exhibition the day before and met with a Cuban diplomat.

"It's not very, very regimented because we can go out and see things but we have to conform to the rules," said Anderson, who was on an eight-day trip with his parents that cost them about \$6,000 each, including a charter flight to the island. "But we're not

Industriales baseball team. Critics sometimes complain that the trips already veer into tourism, with occasional group chats and lectures on politics and culture thrown in.

And while education is the primary purpose of these trips, some travelers readily

41-year-old emergency room doctor from Boston who was on a tour that included the Havana Jazz Festival.

Dozens of operators offer people-to-people travel at prices that typically range from \$2,000 to \$6,000. Some cater to specific



In this December, 2014 photo, tourists fill the famous La Bodeguita del Medio bar where U.S. author Ernest Hemingway used to drink in Old Havana, Cuba. Experts don't expect American tourists to flood Cuba soon after new travel regulations are established, guzzling mojitos and lining up at beachside buffets. The complexity of the legal details and the possibility, even remote, of fines for violations will probably mean most new travel to Cuba will still go through tour organizers.

(AP Photo/Desmond Boylan)

on a leash. We can wander around."

There are already scores of trips on all sorts of topics: baseball, architecture, dance, photography, bird-watching, cigars, churches, visits to colonial cities and to scenic rural parks. Visitors can run in the Havana Marathon or cheer for the

admit the appeal of Cuba is a mix of the exotic and the basic desire for sunny weather.

"I thought, OK, I'm going to go somewhere I have no idea about, that has music that I'm going to learn about that I really don't have any idea about," said Katja Von Tiesenhausen, a

groups such as academic and legal organizations and others are for the general public.

The precise number of people who take them is unknown but experts say most of the 100,000 or so non-Cuban Americans who visit the island legally each year come this route.



Happy Holidays!

The Buccaneer Restaurant will be closed December 25, 26th, 31st (New Year's Eve) & January 1st (New Year's Day).

The Entire Buccaneer Staff would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Belfast leaders near deal to save power-sharing

S. POGATCHNIK
Associated Press

DUBLIN (AP) — Northern Ireland leaders said Monday they are close to reaching an agreement to sustain their troubled Catholic-Protestant government, but faced all-night negotiations to see whether they can seal a deal.

Irish Catholic and British Protestant politicians have spent the past 11 weeks seeking to resolve several chronic disputes that threaten to destroy their 7 ½-year-old alliance. In 2007, following nearly four decades of civil strife that left 3,700 dead, longtime enemies formed a joint Cabinet in pursuit of

lasting peace in Northern Ireland, a part of the United Kingdom. But their five-party coalition has proved increasingly feud-prone, fueling pressure to disband their partnership in advance of U.K.-wide elections expected by May 2015. The rival Irish nationalist and British unionist camps have

been unable to agree on new powers governing the public display of British and Irish symbols, nor on regulating how Protestant fraternal groups parade across Northern Ireland each summer. Conflicts over restrictions on flags and parades have inspired spasms of rioting. Negotiators also seek agree-

ment on how best to investigate Northern Ireland's catalog of unsolved killings and, most controversially, which side's cases should take priority. Both sides agree they want the British government in London to provide extra funding as the cornerstone for any new power-sharing pact. □

Dozens injured in 3 separate attacks in France

GREG KELLER
Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French authorities urged calm after a series of attacks across the country left dozens of people injured, and said there was no evidence the violent acts were connected by any terrorist motive. In the latest incident, 11 people were injured after a driver crashed his van into a crowded Christmas market in western France Monday evening. The driver then stabbed himself several times and is among five people hospitalized in serious condition, authorities said.

The attack, in the town Nantes, came after a pair of weekend attacks: one in which another driver ran down 13 bystanders in the city Dijon in eastern France, and one in which a recent convert to Islam knifed police officers outside the city of Tours.

Speaking on French television, Interior Ministry spokesman Pierre-Henry Brandet said the driver in Nantes "deliberately crashed into the crowd."

While police investigations continued late Monday,

local prosecutor Brigitte Lamy said the incident was an isolated incident and "not a terrorist act." Lamy said the driver was

at the city's main square, surrounded by police and rescue workers. In a signal of how serious the government was tak-

Cazeneuve was heading to Nantes Monday evening after spending the day in Dijon. The driver there was ar-

the driver behind the attack in that city has a long history of severe mental illness and no links to terrorism.

The man, who is 40, has admitted his role in the attack, said prosecutor Marie-Christine Tarrare. She said the man, the French-born son of North African immigrants, acted alone and had no religious motivations, but was upset at the treatment of Chechen children.

He shouted 'God is great' to give himself courage to act, and not out of religious belief, Tarrare said.

However, counter-terrorist police are investigating the attack Saturday on police in a suburb of Tours, which left two officers seriously injured and a third with light injuries.

Paris prosecutor Francois Molins said that attacker, who was killed by police, was a 20-year-old from Burundi named Bertrand. Police believe he'd been drawn to radical Islam several years ago by his 19-year-old brother Brice, who's been detained for questioning by police in Burundi, Molins said. □



Police officers guard the van that crashed into a French Christmas market in Nantes, western France, Monday, Dec. 22, 2014. France's top security official says the driver stabbed himself several times after the incident. Eleven people including the driver were injured in the accident, which happened at a busy market full of holiday shoppers.

a 37-year-old man born in the western French city of Saintes, about 240 kilometers (150 miles) south of Nantes.

Video images on French television showed a white Peugeot van in the market

ing the attacks, Prime Minister Manuel Valls issued a statement late Monday calling for calm and vigilance.

The series of attacks, he said, "concerns us all."

Interior Minister Bernard

rested following the attack, while the assailant who stabbed the officers outside the city of Tours was shot to death by police. None of the victims in those attacks died.

The prosecutor in Dijon said

Truck veering out of control kills Glasgow pedestrians

PAUL KELBIE
GREGORY KATZ
Associated Press

GLASGOW, Scotland (AP) — A number of people were killed and injured Monday when a garbage truck crashed into a group of pedestrians in downtown Glasgow, police said. The truck hit a number of pedestrians as it veered out of control along a crowded road in the city center, Superintendent

Stewart Carle of Police Scotland said.

He said the incident was "a road traffic accident, nothing more sinister."

"For now it does not look to be a criminal or deliberate act that has taken place here this afternoon, but we need to have time to investigate it," he said, adding that the truck driver is being treated in a nearby hospital.

Carle said he couldn't

confirm how many fatalities there had been because it "was over a number of sites." However, he said at least seven people had been seriously injured and warned that number may rise.

Onlookers suggested the driver became ill and lost control of the vehicle, but officials did not confirm this. The crash happened near George Square in the central part of the city

mid-afternoon, when the streets were thronged with Christmas shoppers.

Holiday shopper Alison Keith, who was yards away when the accident happened, said chaos ensued. "I heard screaming and saw people running toward George Square," said Keith, 31. "By the time I got round the corner there were people trying to help the injured. It was horrific. There were people crying

and shouting."

She said it appeared the driver "had lost control and shot across the road" into the entrance of the Queen Street train station, hitting pedestrians along the way. Police and rescue services arrived very quickly, Keith said.

Roads surrounding the site were closed and at least six ambulances and dozens of police and fire vehicles responded. □



Diamonds International's Annual Holiday Cocktail Party



ORANJESTAD - On December 18th Diamonds International together with invited guests, celebrated in an evening of holiday festivity and indulgent luxury shopping. For the month of December, Diamonds International has invited their friends and family to share in their employee discount, a phenomenal offer which has attracted many so far to take advantage of these huge savings rarely seen on luxury items. Not only that, many guests during the night took advantage as well of the layaway program at 0%! The store was alive as hors d'oeuvres and champagne flowed and Christmas presents were purchased for loved ones. Thank you to all of our guests that attended on this wonderful evening and shared with us some holiday cheer. A special thank you goes also to your Excellency Arthur Dowers, Minister of Justice for joining us during the night enjoying together of such joyful night. Diamonds International would like to congratulate Ms. Astrid Muller, the lucky winner of our raffle prize, a fabulous diamond necklace from one of their luxury collections, Sara G. Diamonds International is now one of the largest jewelry retailers in the world. They have more locations



in the Caribbean than any other fine jeweler, and a network that stretches from the company's New York City headquarters into Mexico, across the Caribbean and as far as Alaska. Diamonds International has extended an invite to all local Arubians to shop with them and enjoy the discounted prices for this holiday season. Located in downtown Oranjestad, at Port of Call open 9-7pm Monday through Friday and 9-6pm on Saturdays. □

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PALM BEACH – Celebrating Christmas in a perfect Caribbean setting is a bucket list item to many. For those people Bugaloe is pulling out all the stops to ensure the best Caribbean Christmas Celebration setting with relaxing vibes and live music. Bugaloe Beach Bar & Grill is located on De Palm Pier between the Radisson Resort and Riu Palace Ho-

tel. For over 10 years Bugaloe has been a getaway location for people from all over the world. Every day is a fun day at the beach bar with a double happy hour and live music. This Christmas the Bugaloe crew together with Chef Marc Hernandez has selected a delicious 3-course menu for only \$45 per person. Your choices include



beautifully prepared Ossobuco, Honeyham and Grill Sea Bass as entrees and mouth-watering deserts as a Coffee Crème Brulee and a White & Dark Chocolate mousse.

Sit down in any of the 360 degree ocean view seats, and enjoy a night full of treats, tricks and surprises. Live music will be provided by Bugaloe's very own professional per-

formers Benny Holzken and Robin Pels, while you savor a romantic delicious 3-course dinner for only \$45 per person. For reservations call +297-586 2233 or mail to info@bugaloe.com

***ALHYDRAN*, a highly recommended medical moisture-regulating gel cream in burn clinics worldwide now locally available.**

Tourists and locals love Aruba Aloes' skincare and sun care products, many of them become loyal customers once they have tried it, ordering their products online or visiting the shops once they are back on Aruba. But what most people don't know is that Aruba Aloe also produces a highly concentrated moisture regulating gel-cream called *Alhydran* which is used for the aftercare treatment of burn scars, surgical wounds, redness, itching, rashes after laser therapy or chemotherapy and other scar tissue. This very effective locally produced cream has become one of the new standards in scar treatment in university hospitals and burn clinics worldwide. Sold in over 22 countries, ranging from countries in Europe to even South Korea, this unique Aruban export product is locally available in all Aruba Aloe stores, www.arubaaloe.com and since the month of June in *MEDIQ* pharmacies.

A success story

Wim Arns, a middle-aged Dutch man, got severely burned on his hands and face when cigar ashes drifted down in the bucket of paraffin oil he was holding, causing a spontaneous explosion. Wim: "The explosion caused the burning paraffin oil to run all over my hands and a burst of flames burnt my whole face. It was such a painful and horrible experience I thought I would never recover and look normal again. After being treated in the Burn Centre clinic in Rotterdam, the doctors referred me to a skin therapist in my hometown where I should continue the sensitive after care of the burn scars. My skin felt really tight and itchy and I wanted a cream that would make my skin more flexible and stop the itching. That's when the therapist recommended *Alhydran*. Already within an hour of applying the cream, I felt my skin had more space to breathe, the itching stopped and it generally felt more comfortable. My face has healed completely, the skin has total flexibility again and the same counts for my hands. Therapy will also have contributed to this, but that the skin moves freely without tearing and that the itching is all gone, I attribute that to the use of *Alhydran*" said a very grateful Wim.

***Alhydran*; through the eyes of a professional**

Rina Rijkenberg is a certified skin therapist in Oosterbeek, the Netherlands. In her practice she comes into daily contact with people that have a broad range of skin problems and complaints. As a specialist, she has different treatments and products to opt from, but *Alhydran* is her nr 1 solution. Rina: "A lot of complaints are that the skin feels dry, itchy, red, sensitive and painful, which are symptoms frequently associated with burn victims, lymph edema patients, people that have undergone radiation therapy, have general scar tissue, acne or excessive hair. All this can be jointly caused by a deregulation in the moisture levels of the skin, causing the skin to feel dry, itchy and inflexible.



In the case of lymph edema patients, we treat them with lymph drainage paired with creams such as *Alhydran* to regulate the moisture levels of the skin, because with these patients often this isn't functioning properly either. I think that the secret to *Alhydran* mainly is that it regulates the moisture levels of the skin continuously in an unprecedented way. Apply it onto your skin in the morning and it will remain active throughout the day, benefitting you with a less itchy and painful skin. The most important ingredient of the cream is very high dosage of pure Aloe Vera gel delivering the hydration, followed by pure Vitamin C, Vitamin E and Jojoba oil prolonging the activity. For us specialists the most important benefit of the cream is the patients' experience and that they can actually see and feel their skin healing" says Rina confidently.

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“Red Sail Sports treats the “One Million Visitor to Aruba”



PALM BEACH - What a nice treat to the 'One Million Visitors' winner to Aruba! Red Sail Sports offered Harki Dhaliwal and her spouse a complementary trip on their popular Antilla Snorkel Sail. The couple arrived a few days ago and was to-

tally overwhelmed. 'Everyone is so nice and welcoming to us' said Harki after being surprised at the pier. Captain Rich and his crew, Gregory and Eugene gave the couple each a nice backpack with goodies to take with them on the sailing trip. Congratulations to the couple and thank you to the Red Sail Sports crew. □



Interval International hosts the 16TH annual SOIC 2014

Miami, Fla. - The 16th annual Shared Ownership Investment Conference [SOIC 2014] was recently held in Miami Beach, Florida. The conference brings together experts and leaders in the industry with attendees from around the world learning about financing, marketing and policy development as well as trends on the state of shared ownership and the tourism industry as a whole.

In short, this event is a 'how to' on building and maintaining timeshare from the ground up.

The first day of the SOIC 2014 gave a look into the state of the industry looked at global vacation travel trends with an eye towards the Caribbean and Latin America.

Tourism is Aruba's economic engine and the No.1 destination for timeshare owners in the Caribbean. The conference producer, Interval International, has been a significant contributor to that success.

Interval International is a pioneer in vacation ownership exchanges services.

The old template was buy a timeshare unit, lock in your weeks and forever more vacation on during those weeks at the timeshare. Interval International created a program allowing members of affiliated resorts the flexibility to trade not only the dates but also the location

From humble beginnings in 1976 with 3 employees and one resort, today Interval International boasts nearly 2 million owners, almost 3000 affiliated resorts in 80 countries. The SOIC was started by Interval International in 1998 as a way to inform developers on how to move product to the



"View from the Top" panelists gathered during the 16th annual Shared Ownership Investment Conference in Miami Beach, Florida. Included are (L to R) Jonathan Fredericks, president of Welk Resorts; Roberto Rotter, executive director of Plaza Hotéis and president of the Hotel Operators' Forum of Brazil; Craig M. Nash, chairman, president and CEO, Interval Leisure Group; Mike Hampton, Ed.D., dean, Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management, Florida International University; Stephen P. Weisz, president and CEO, Marriott Vacations Worldwide.

Caribbean.

Nearly half of the Aruban economy is generated from timeshare. It is one of the most mature with 30 years experience and one of the best-developed shared ownership markets. The island has the most available rooms in the Caribbean. The timeshare and tourism industry struggled from 2008 -2011. The U.S economic downturn affected almost all related and peripheral industries. 80% of the Aruba tourists come from the U.S. The island's economy as well felt some of the repercussions of the recession. By 2012 Aruba had climbed out and started to reach even higher than expected goals. Timeshare2.0 becomes Shared Ownership. Timeshare is the common

name by which the industry is known but little-by-little the term is being replaced by shared ownership. The industry has moved forward not only in name but also in marketing, financing, accessibility.

Interval has become a one-stop of travel and leisure services.

Interval International has

offices in 16 different countries but is also available by computer at www.IntervalWorld.com and the Interval International app. On its website there is a ticker tape showing you the exchanges, location and availability in real-time.

The two-day conference was highlighted by the presentation of "Multicultural

Marketing Today" by, Kelly McDonald author of 'How to Market to People Not Like You: "Know It or Blow It Rules for Reaching Diverse Customers.

Location has been a big help to the island as well. Snuggled deep in the Caribbean and off the coast of Venezuela Aruba is slowly building a Latin American clientele taking advantage of its all-summer climate as well it accessibility.

The majority of the island's residents speak 4 languages and 55 nationalities living together. This is an automatic up sell to first-time and frequent visitors who eventually become owners.

Current forecasts show Aruba's future in tourism to be as bright as the island. □



Some of our Trip Advisor reviews in a nutshell

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Skiers have reservations over airbag safety system

ANDREW DAMPF
AP Sports Writer

VAL GARDENA, Italy (AP)

— Some skiers are concerned they will turn into the puffy “Michelin Man” when they are not supposed to.

Others are afraid they will lose precious hundredths of a second due to slightly more wind resistance.

And still more believe that their movements will be restricted.

Whatever the reasons, few — if any — skiers are expected to use a radical new airbag safety system in January when it will be cleared for use in World Cup downhill races.

“January could still be early. But not because we have problems but because the athletes are not confident,” said Marco Pastore, the sponsoring manager for Italian manufacturer Dainese, which developed the system with the International Ski Federation through four years of data collection and testing.

The airbag fits in a vest that is incorporated into skiers’ back protectors and is designed to inflate when skiers lose control and are about to crash. A 4.5-centimeter long (1.8-inch) gas generator inflates the airbag and the entire system adds about 800 grams (less than two pounds) of weight to the back protector.

“I’m encouraging my guys to try it, to get fit for it,” U.S. men’s head coach Sasha Rearick said. “The plastic where the airbag is itself is quite stiff. The way it fits is what they’re working on right now, to make sure they can move comfortably with it.”

Dainese-sponsored athletes like Werner Heel of

Italy and Jan Hudec and Manuel Osborne-Paradis of Canada have been testing the system in training for two seasons. Bode Miller is in the first year of a sponsorship deal with Dainese but he’s been out following back surgery.

“We need to fit the suits better to incorporate it,”

Austria crashed and was airlifted off the downhill course by helicopter with a concussion and bruises all over the left side of his body.

“For the Florian Scheiber crash, it would have been very good,” Pastore said, noting that the airbag can protect the neck,

“It’s a little bit slower because it’s not aerodynamic like wearing nothing under the suit,” said Olympic downhill champion Matthias Mayer.

“That’s not true,” Waldner said. “The Austrian and Italian teams tested it in the wind tunnel in Maranello and all of the

“Anything that’s going to improve our safety is something that should be considered but at the same time I have my worries about it,” American skier Lindsey Vonn said. “What if you went off a jump and you landed totally fine and for some reason the impact made



Lotte Smiseth Sejersted of Norway receives first aid after falling during an alpine ski, women’s World Cup Downhill in Val d’Isere, France, Saturday, Dec. 20, 2014.

Heel said, adding that he’s not ready to race with it yet.

Dainese introduced a similar system for motorcycle racing a decade ago.

“It took 10 years to get all (the riders) to wear the system,” Pastore said. “At the beginning we were asking them to use it. Now they ask us.”

Pastore discussed the project Saturday, a day after Florian Scheiber of

shoulders, trunk and back areas.

“They’ll use it, you’ll see,” said FIS men’s World Cup director Markus Waldner. “If you go flying off an icy course at 140 kph (90 mph) and all of a sudden you have protection around your neck and upper body, that’s pretty good. That’s why the MotoGP riders use it.”

But skiers need to move their bodies more than motorcycle riders.

data showed it’s not a disadvantage.”

The system is not available for sale yet but a potential price tag could run about 1,000 euros (\$1,230), Pastore said, adding that any World Cup athlete can have free access to it.

While the system has been cleared for optional use on both the men’s and women’s circuits, the only female skier to test it so far is a Swiss Europa Cup skier.

it deploy? But if it’s proven to be more safe than it’s definitely something I would try in training.”

Vonn has been slowed over the past two seasons by a series of knee tears, the most common injury to skiers. An airbag for the knees and legs is the next project Dainese is hoping to develop.

“We have some ideas about the knees,” Pastore said. “There is some data on the table.” □

Associated Press

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The ins and outs of the division playoff races

By BARRY WILNER

AP Pro Football Writer

With five of the six play-off slots in the NFC and four in the AFC decided, some would think much of the drama of the schedule's final week has been removed.

Think again.

All nine of the teams already qualified for the Super Bowl chase have something to play for on Sunday.

Start with the defending league champion Seahawks (11-4). Excluding any Week 17 ties in the multitude of scenarios, Seattle not only will get the NFC West title by beating St. Louis, but also home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs. Not a pleasant thought for its opponents.

"They're playing awesome football," Cardinals cornerback Patrick Peterson said. "You can't take nothing away from that ballclub. They have a championship pedigree, what it takes to win on the road, what it takes to win the division. Obviously, it's not over yet, but they're one step closer."

New England (12-3) doesn't need anything else to happen but to beat visiting Buffalo on Sunday to clinch staying home for the AFC playoffs. The Patriots already are the first team since the current postseason format was adopted in 1990 to get five consecutive first-round byes.

Denver (11-3) headed into Monday night's game at Cincinnati (9-4-1) with the AFC West secured. But a win against the Bengals would give

the Broncos a first-round bye, and keep them on the heels of the Patriots for the top AFC seed.

Meaning their home game with Oakland (3-12) could have significance if Buffalo (8-7) up-

games.

The remaining AFC wild-card spot could go to Cincinnati or Pittsburgh, barring winning the North division; San Diego (9-6); Baltimore (9-6); Houston (8-7); or Kansas City (8-7).

4 seed and host a game on wild-card weekend.

"It says a lot about the guys in here," Panthers tight end Greg Olsen said. "Every year you set out to try to win your division. We have one game

beau Field.

Oops, sorry, didn't mean to throw draws into the mix, but in that case it's essential.

For Green Bay to get the No. 1 spot in the conference, it must win and



Seattle Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch leaps into the end zone for a touchdown against the Arizona Cardinals during the second half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 21, 2014, in Glendale, Ariz. Associated Press

sets New England.

The Bengals would grab a playoff berth by beating Denver on Monday night, and regardless will play at already-qualified Pittsburgh on Sunday for the AFC North crown. Indianapolis (10-5) has the AFC South title and will be either the No. 3 or No. 4 seed. The Colts are at Tennessee (2-13), which has the inside track for the top overall draft pick through 15

The Chargers have the easiest task: win at KC and advance.

But all of them remain alive heading to the weekend, with Jacksonville (3-12) at Houston, and Cleveland (7-8) at Baltimore.

The sixth NFC spot will go to the survivor in the South, where Atlanta (6-9) hosts Carolina (6-8-1). Yes, a losing team will not only make the postseason, but will be the No.

left and it is right in front of us."

With Seattle, Arizona, NFC East champ Dallas, Green Bay and Detroit all at 11-4, byes are up for grabs. The Cowboys have the most difficult road to get the top seed because the Packers host the Lions and both own the tiebreaker over Dallas. The Cowboys need a victory at Washington (4-11), an Arizona loss and a tie at Lam-

have Seattle lose. Detroit must win and have both Seattle and Arizona lose. As for earning a bye, the winner of Detroit-Green Bay gets one.

"It's what you play the game for," Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford said. "You play the game to play extremely meaningful games in December. They'll be excited for it. I know everybody in our locker room will be excited as well." □

Pistons, eyeing younger players, waive Josh Smith

By NOAH TRISTER

AP Sports Writer

AUBURN HILLS, Mich. (AP)

— Stan Van Gundy kept Detroit's awkward core of frontcourt players together during his first offseason as team president, hoping the Pistons would show signs of improvement without any drastic moves.

Now Detroit is 5-23. Time for a shake-up. The Pistons waived forward Josh Smith, less than halfway through the lucrative four-year contract he signed before the 2013-14 season. Van Gundy, who is also Detroit's coach, said he wants to develop younger players. "If we were 12-16 or 10-18, we probably wouldn't be here," Van Gundy said. "We're 5-23. That calls, in every respect, for some adjustment. Some things had to be different." Smith signed a \$54 million, four-year deal with the Pistons before last season,



In this Dec. 17, 2014 file photo, Detroit Pistons forward Josh Smith reacts to a call during the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Dallas Mavericks in Auburn Hills, Mich.

Associated Press

but he shot only 42 percent from the field in 2013-14. This season, Smith is at 39 percent. The 29-year-old forward's poor perimeter shooting has been a problem for Detroit, but he does fill up the stat sheet. He's averaging 7.2 rebounds

and a career-best 4.7 assists per game this season. Van Gundy wants to adjust offensive roles, and it would have been hard to do that with Smith remaining such a focal point. "He's taking the most shots, he's a high-assist guy. He's

got the ball in his hands a lot," Van Gundy said. "We would have had to have reduced his role offensively. I don't think he would have been happy with that at this point in his career. I don't think it necessarily would have been fair to him."

The Pistons signed Smith as part of Joe Dumars' final offseason in charge of basketball operations. When that busy offseason didn't result in a playoff berth, Detroit brought in Van Gundy to replace Dumars and also coach the team.

The frontcourt mix of Smith, Greg Monroe and Andre Drummond looks good on paper, but the team has lacked on-court chemistry. Monroe, who can become an unrestricted free agent next offseason, has started only 14 games in 2014-15. Monroe and point guard Brandon Jennings both said they were caught

off guard by the news of Smith's departure.

"This is definitely the most surprising thing that's happened since I've been in the league," Monroe said. That's saying something, since the Pistons have lacked stability throughout Monroe's career. They fired coach Maurice Cheeks in February, before he had a chance to finish his first season at the helm.

The Pistons have not made the playoffs since 2009.

Van Gundy said the stretch provision of the collective bargaining agreement will help Detroit's salary cap situation: the Pistons can stretch out Smith's remaining salary over a longer period of time to reduce the annual cap hit. Van Gundy said the Pistons are better off dropping Smith this way than if they'd traded him and had to take on long-term commitments in return. □

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NBA Capsules

LeBron James guides Cavaliers over Grizzlies

The Associated Press

CLEVELAND (AP) — LeBron James had 25 points and 11 assists, Dion Waiters scored 13 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter and the Cleveland Cavaliers handled one of the Western Conference's best teams, beating the Memphis Grizzlies 105-91 on Sunday.

James scored 16 points in the second half and the Cavs shot a season-best 61 percent from the field to improve to 3-6 against West teams. Anderson Varejao added 18 points and Kyrie Irving had 17 points and 12 assists for the Cavs, who are 11-3 since their sluggish 5-7 start.

Cleveland, which has won eight of nine at home, is 9-2 when James has at least nine assists.

Marc Gasol had 23 points and 11 rebounds for the Grizzlies, who played without forward Zach Randolph. He's nursing a sore and swollen right knee he injured Friday night in a loss at Chicago.

Jon Leuer added 16 points for Memphis, which dropped to 21-6.

KINGS 108, LAKERS 101
SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — DeMarcus Cousins had 29 points and 14 rebounds in his second start since returning from a serious illness,

and Sacramento beat Los Angeles to snap a five-game losing streak. Rudy Gay scored 24 points, and Ben McLemore added 23 points and eight rebounds to help the Kings pull away late. Sacramento had lost 10 of 12 games — going 2-8 while Cousins recovered from viral meningitis — and fired coach Michael Malone last week.

Tyrone Corbin won for the first time in three games as Sacramento's interim coach.

Nick Young scored 26 points, and Kobe Bryant had 25 for the Lakers, who have lost six of eight. Bryant shot just 8 of 30 and had five rebounds and three assists.

PELICANS 101, THUNDER 99
OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Anthony Davis scored 38 points to lead New Orleans past Oklahoma City.

It was the third-highest point total of Davis' career. He made 16 of 22 shots and had 12 rebounds.

Jrue Holiday had 11 points and matched a career high with 15 assists for the Pelicans.

Russell Westbrook scored 29 points for the Thunder, but he missed a 3-pointer that could have given Oklahoma City the lead in the closing seconds. Reg-

gie Jackson added 19 points.

Oklahoma City forward Kevin Durant missed his second straight game because of a sprained right ankle.

SUNS 104, WIZARDS 92
WASHINGTON (AP) — Eric Bledsoe and Markieff Morris each scored 17 points, Goran Dragic added 16 and Phoenix beat Washington to end the Wizards' winning streak at six.

The Suns finished 3-0 on their trip after losing six in a row. They opened the road swing in Charlotte on Wednesday night and beat New York on Saturday.

Rasual Butler led the Wizards with 17 points, and Kevin Seraphin had a season-high 16.

Washington cut it to 95-89 on Paul Pierce's layup with 2:40 to play, but the Suns scored nine straight — seven by Bledsoe — to take a 104-89 lead with 1:01 to play.

RAPTORS 118, KNICKS 108
TORONTO (AP) — Lou Williams and Kyle Lowry each scored 22 points, and Toronto Raptors beat New York for its sixth consecutive win.

Greivis Vasquez had 21 points and Terrence Ross added 18 for the Raptors,



Memphis Grizzlies' Jon Leuer (30) shoots against Cleveland Cavaliers' Dion Waiters (3) in the second quarter of an NBA basketball game Sunday, Dec. 21, 2014, in Cleveland.

Associated Press

who never trailed in matching their longest winning streak of the season. Toronto also won six straight from Nov. 15-26.

Carmelo Anthony scored 28 points for New York. The Knicks lost their fifth straight and have dropped 15 of 16 overall. New York fell to 2-13 on the road and 1-6 in the second game of back-to-backs.

HEAT 100, CELTICS 84
MIAMI (AP) — Luol Deng had 23 points, James Ennis scored 10 of his 16 in the fourth quarter and Miami beat Boston end five-game home losing streak.

It was the first time in 154 games that Miami didn't have any of its former Big Three — Dwyane Wade, Chris Bosh or LeBron James. Wade sat with a bruised right knee, Bosh missed his fifth straight game with a left calf strain and James now plays for Cleveland.

Tyler Zeller scored 22 points for Boston, which had won three straight.

PACERS 100, TIMBERWOLVES 96

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — C.J. Miles scored 28 points and David West bulled his way to the basket for two big

points with 34 seconds to play to help Indiana hold off Minnesota.

Miles hit 10 of 18 shots and Roy Hibbert had 15 points, eight rebounds and four blocks for the Pacers, who got 48 points from their bench. They shot a season-high 50 percent from the field on the second night of a back-to-back and forced 16 turnovers to win for just the second time this month.

Mo Williams had 24 points and 10 assists for the Timberwolves.

76ERS 96, MAGIC 88
ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Michael Carter-Williams scored 21 points and Philadelphia rallied in the second half to beat Orlando for its third victory of the season.

The 76ers ended a five-game losing streak. All three of their victories have come on the road.

Victor Oladipo had 23 points for the Magic.

NETS 110, PISTONS 105
NEW YORK (AP) — Mason Plumlee scored 10 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter and had 12 rebounds in Brooklyn's victory over Detroit.

Wounded ex-NBA player Carl Herrera improves in Venezuela

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— Former NBA player Carl Herrera is out of intensive care and improving following a weekend shooting, the team he coaches and one of his sons said Monday.

The Gigantes de Guayana team said in a series of Twitter posts that Herrera, the first Venezuelan to play in the NBA, is no longer in critical condition "and is improving day by day."

Herrera, 48, was shot Saturday during an apparent

robbery attempt at a restaurant on Margarita Island off Venezuela's Caribbean coast.

His son Johnatan said in an interview that Herrera had been moved to a room at a private clinic and has been able to walk and speak.

He said a bullet had passed through Herrera's arm and lodged in his side. The team said doctors had ruled out surgery.

The country's Interior Relations Minister Carmen Me-

lendez said security forces are on the trail of the attackers.

Herrera was a power forward during the 1990s for Houston, San Antonio, Vancouver and Denver, scoring more than 2,400 points over a nine-year career. Now 48, he's coaching a team in the Venezuelan league.

The Trinidad-born player, who is also a citizen of Venezuela, attended the University of Houston.

Zepp gets win in NHL debut against Jets

The Associated Press

WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP)

— Rob Zepp made 25 saves in his NHL debut and Jakub Voracek scored 10 seconds into overtime, sending the Philadelphia Flyers to a 4-3 victory over the Winnipeg Jets on Sunday night.

Voracek and linemate Claude Giroux forced a Dustin Byfuglien turnover behind the Winnipeg net, and Voracek slid the puck through Ondrej Pavelec's pads for his second goal of the game.

Vincent Lecavalier had two third-period goals for the Flyers, who rallied from a 3-1 deficit.

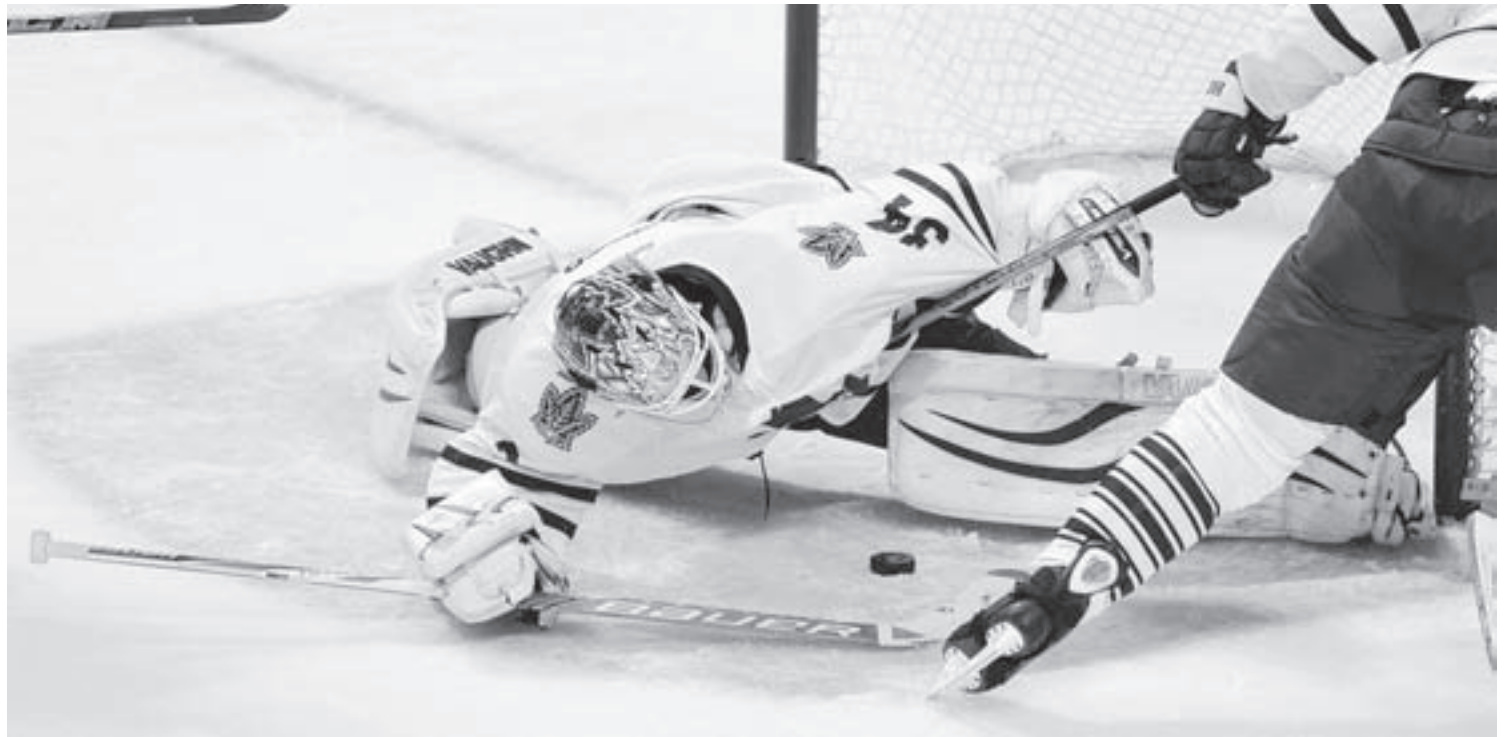
Matt Halischuk, Mathieu Perreault and Byfuglien scored for Winnipeg. Pavelec made 19 saves.

The 33-year-old Zepp was promoted from Lehigh Valley of the American Hockey League due to an injury to starter Steve Mason. The Flyers say he is the oldest goaltender to win his NHL debut since 1926.

Zepp, who spent the previous seven seasons in Germany, had a sprawling toe save on Mark Scheifele late in the second period.

BLACKHAWKS 4, MAPLE LEAFS 0

CHICAGO (AP) — Patrick Kane had a power-play goal and two assists, lead-



Toronto Maple Leafs goalie James Reimer makes a save during the second period of an NHL hockey game against the Chicago Blackhawks in Chicago, Sunday, Dec. 21, 2014.

Associated Press

ing Antti Raanta and the Blackhawks to the win.

The Blackhawks played with a "CR" decal on their helmets after assistant equipment manager Clint Reif died earlier in the day. The team said it was "deeply saddened" by the loss and declined further comment while asking for respect for the privacy for Reif's family and friends.

Raanta made 31 saves for his second shutout of the season, helping Chicago rebound from a 3-2 shootout loss Saturday night in

Columbus.

James Reimer made 30 saves in Toronto's third straight loss following a six-game winning streak.

AVALANCHE 2, RED WINGS 1, SO

DETROIT (AP) — Jarome Iginla scored in the ninth shootout round to lift the Avalanche to the victory.

Iginla got a wrist shot past Petr Mrazek, who had turned away six straight Avalanche shooters. Nathan MacKinnon and Matt Duchene also scored in the tiebreaker as Colorado

ended a three-game road trip with five points.

Gustav Nyquist and Tomas Tatar had shootout goals for Detroit, which fell to 1-7 this season in the tiebreaker. Detroit had a 22-12 shots advantage five minutes into the third period and finally cashed in when Pavel Datsyuk wristed a power-play shot past Avalanche goalie Calvin Pickard for his 13th goal.

The Avalanche tied it with 4:15 left in regulation when Erik Johnson scored on the power play for his eighth of

the season.

RANGERS 1, HURRICANES 0

NEW YORK (AP) — Ryan McDonagh scored in the first and Cam Talbot made 18 saves, leading New York to its sixth consecutive win. The Rangers completed a sweep of the home-and-home weekend series against the Eastern Conference-worst Hurricanes, who lost for the eighth time in nine games.

Talbot is 3-3-1 this season backing up Henrik Lundqvist, with all three of his victories being shutouts. □

Sergio Romo finalizes \$15M, 2-year deal with Giants

By JANIE McCAULEY

AP Baseball Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) -- Sergio Romo tested free agency, had some offers and ultimately decided he wanted to stay put in San Francisco pitching for the only team he has known.

The animated reliever finalized a \$15 million, two-year contract with the Giants on Monday, keeping a key member of the bullpen who has been part of three championship runs.

"When it comes to professional baseball, this has been my home," Romo said. "I'm very thankful for every opportunity that I've gotten. This was a place I was able to make a name



In a March 31, 2014, file photo San Francisco Giants' Sergio Romo celebrates the final out against the Arizona Diamondbacks during the ninth inning of an opening day baseball game in Phoenix.

Associated Press

for myself. This is the only organization I know."

Romo gets a \$2 million signing bonus payable by Dec. 30 and salaries of \$5 million next year and \$8 million in 2016. The right-hander could earn an additional \$500,000 annually in performance bonuses based on games finished as part of the agreement: \$100,000 each for 30 and each additional five through 50.

San Francisco also was nearing completion of right-hander Jake Peavy's \$24 million, two-year deal. A formal announcement was planned for Tuesday. The 31-year-old Romo has spent all seven of his big league seasons with San

Francisco, winning titles in 2010, '12 and this year. He went 6-4 with a 3.72 ERA with 23 saves in 64 outings last season as San Francisco earned the wild card and went on to beat Kansas City in a seven-game World Series. "All in all, I really wanted to stay home. I wanted to stay here," Romo said. "I don't really see myself wearing another uniform." Romo and Santiago Casilla have shared the closer job in recent years, with Casilla again taking over ninth-inning duties in 2014 after Romo blew three saves in June. "He's meant so much to our success," manager Bruce Bochy said. □

NYC subways slowly upgrading from 1930s-era technology

VERENA DOBNIK
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City's subways — the biggest U.S. mass transit network — serve more than 6 million daily riders who depend largely on a signal system that dates back to the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Antiquated electro-mechanics with thousands of moving parts are still critical to operations. Dispatchers still monitor most trains from 24-hour underground "towers," and they still put pencil to paper to track their progress. That eight-decade-old system is slowly being replaced by 21st-century digital technology that allows up to twice as many trains to safely travel closer together. But there's a big caveat: It could take at least 20 years for the city's 700 miles (1,127 kilometers) of tracks to be fully computerized.

Of the subway system's almost two dozen major lines, just one, the L linking Manhattan and Brooklyn, currently operates on new, computerized, automated signals. And the modernization of the No. 7 line from Manhattan to Queens has begun, to be completed by 2017.

So, for at least the foreseeable future, New York subway riders can expect the snags, weekend shut-downs and overcrowding they have become ac-



In this Dec. 16, 2014 photo, MTA subway train dispatcher Joe Maher work in a control room of mostly 1930s technology for subway interlocking switch and signal control, at the 4th Street MTA Supervisory Tower in New York. Associated Press

customed to.

"We're at the physical limits of what the original technology can carry," acknowledges Adam Lisberg, spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority that New York City Transit's subways.

But he says safety is not being sacrificed.

"This stuff is old, but it works — it works really well," he says, his voice rising above the roar of a 400-ton train passing through a Greenwich Village station.

Much of New York's subways continue to operate with the equipment from the 1930s, kept running by a maintenance team



that's forced to fabricate replacement parts long out of production.

Wynton Habersham, the MTA's chief of signals and track operations, recently led an Associated Press reporter and photographer on a walking tour through some of the 22 control "towers" — as the dispatcher spaces are called, though they're buried deep beneath the streets.

In the cramped, worn-out Greenwich Village tower, MTA workers monitor light boards that show train locations and movement. The dispatchers answer phone calls and listen to two-way radio reports while keeping an eye on each train's progress.

A massive cabinet is arrayed with levers to move switches through a warren of electrical connections to relays that were cutting-edge technology at the same time as the Hindenburg airship.

Hidden from straphangers, these are the guts of the urban transit network that guide subway traffic through nearly 500 stations.

Behind a door off a platform on Manhattan's West Side at 14th Street is the system's single gleaming, high-tech operation. It allows about two dozen L trains to move each hour in both directions — compared to about 15 with the old mechanics — on a route that takes an

average of 37 minutes.

Amid peeling paint, rusty stairs and old-fashioned metal cabinets is a labyrinth of digitalized panels and switches that automatically relay signals in the tunnels, tracing both direction and speed without human help. In case of an emergency, however, the computerized controls can be manually overridden by operators in the cab of each train.

The updating has allowed more cars to be added to the L line, which has become one of the city's most crowded thanks to growth in Brooklyn's hip Williamsburg neighborhood.

It will cost up to \$250 million to convert each con-

trol tower and link it to tracks and switches. The work is included in the MTA's five-year capital program, which uses city, state and federal money but has a \$15 billion funding gap.

Europe has long been ahead of the United States, with several cities including London and Paris operating mass transit rails equipped with updated signals.

"The New York system is big and a finite amount of money was available, for decades," concludes engineer Nabil Ghaly, the MTA's chief signal engineer until he retired in 2007. "We have to catch up." □



Sale of Morgan Stanley oil division to Rosneft aborted

STANLEY REED

© 2014 New York Times

Morgan Stanley and Rosneft said Monday that they were terminating the agreed sale of a large portion of Morgan Stanley's oil trading business to the state-controlled Russian oil company. The sale was announced a year ago, but regulators declined to clear the arrangement, creating "an objective impossibility to complete the deal," Rosneft

said in a statement Monday. Morgan Stanley had said the agreement would expire if necessary approvals were not received by Saturday. The collapse of the sale of the trading unit is the latest energy-related deal to encounter difficulties after tensions arose between the West and Russia over Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin of Russia said this month that he was calling off a long-planned giant

pipeline called South Stream that was to bring Russian gas under the Black Sea to Europe. BASF, the German chemical giant, said Thursday that it was cancelling a planned asset swap with Gazprom, the Russian gas export monopoly, that would have seen BASF's oil and gas subsidiary, Wintershall, gain stakes in two west Siberian gas fields in exchange for Gazprom taking full control

of the of two companies' gas trading and storage joint venture in Germany. "Due to the currently difficult political environment, BASF and Gazprom have decided not to complete the asset swap planned for the end of the year," BASF said in a statement. In the Morgan Stanley deal, the bank had agreed to sell a sizable oil trading and storage business to Rosneft. The sale was seen as part of the

effort to address regulators' concerns about the risks of financial institutions engaging in commodities trading. The bank said a year ago that about 100 executives in the United States, Britain and Singapore, or about one-third of its total "front office" commodities personnel, would move to Rosneft as part of the transaction. Morgan Stanley said it would now consider "a variety of options for the unit." □

Wall Street pushes to record highs, continuing a rally

ALEX VEIGA

AP Business Writer

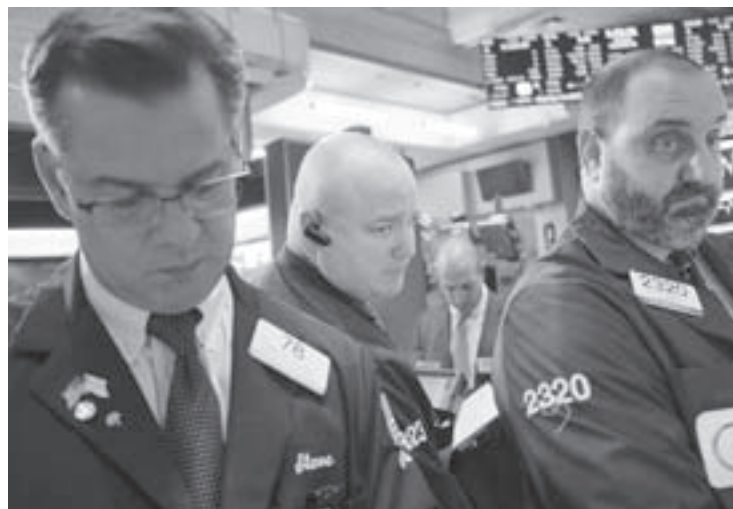
The Dow Jones industrial average and the Standard & Poor's 500 index closed at record highs Monday as the market delivered its fourth gain in as many trading days. Pharmaceutical and technology stocks were among the big risers, while shares in energy companies fell sharply as the decline in oil prices deepened. Discouraging data on U.S. home sales failed to derail the "Santa" rally, what traders often call a pre-Christmas advance. Trading volume was lighter than usual as many investors looked ahead to the Christmas holiday. "We're getting a good Santa Claus rally," said Sam Stovall, U.S. equity strategist at S&P Capital IQ. After a strong finish last week, investors remained mostly in a buying mood Monday. The major stock indexes drifted between small gains and losses in

the morning, as traders digested the latest housing data. The National Association of Realtors reported that sales of previously occupied

holding on to gains that were modest, but good enough for a new set of record highs. The Standard & Poor's 500 index gained 7.89 points,

Its last record close was 17,958.79 on Dec. 5. The Nasdaq composite picked up 16.04 points, or 0.3 percent, to 4,781.42. The Dow and S&P 500 are both up for the month, while the Nasdaq is down. The three indexes are up for the year. Market gains this year have been in line with that of prior years that were also preceded by strong growth, noted Stovall. "On average, the S&P has gained 10 percent in the years following 20-plus-percent advances," he said. "And we're doing just that." The market is coming off a big advance last week, which gave the S&P 500 its second-biggest weekly gain this year. The latest rally kicked off last Wednesday, when Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen delivered remarks that eased investors' concerns that the central bank would start raising interest rates in response

to slowing growth in other major economies. Looking ahead, trading volume is expected to thin out the next couple of days leading into Christmas. "A lot of traders and a lot of investors are going to take the whole week off and that might lead to some volatility," said Mike Serio, regional chief investment officer at Wells Fargo Private Bank. Several economic barometers, including government reports on durable goods, personal income, consumer sentiment and the latest estimate of growth in the third quarter, are due out this week. "If we see any of those numbers really off track, it might affect the market," Serio said. Eight of the 10 sectors in the S&P 500 index rose Monday, led by technology stocks. Health care and energy stocks declined. Pharmaceutical stocks were among those making big moves Monday. □



Traders work on the floor at the New York Stock Exchange in New York. The Dow Jones industrial average and the Standard & Poor's 500 index closed at record highs Monday as the market delivered its fourth gain in as many trading days.
(AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

homes fell 6.1 percent last month to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.93 million. That's the slowest pace in six months. By late morning, the major indexes were rising and

or 0.4 percent, to 2,078.54. The S&P's most recent record close was 2,075.37, set on Dec. 5. The Dow Jones industrial average rose 154.64, or 0.9 percent, to 17,959.44.

Pharmacy deal heralds changed landscape for drugs

ANDREW POLLACK

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In a sign that price competition may take hold for hepatitis C drugs, the nation's largest manager of prescriptions will require all patients to use AbbVie's newly approved treatment rather than two widely used medicines from its rival Gilead Sciences. The pharmacy benefit manager, Express Scripts, said it had negotiated a significant discount from AbbVie in exchange for

making the drugmaker's treatment, Viekira Pak, the exclusive option for 25 million people. Express Scripts also said it would allow all people with hepatitis C to be treated with AbbVie's drug, not only those with more serious liver damage. "We really believe we want all patients treated," Dr. Steve Miller, the chief medical officer of Express Scripts, said in an interview Sunday. He said that AbbVie had made that affordable by offering "a significant discount."

Gilead's drugs have set a new standard, curing the vast majority of patients in only 12 weeks with few side effects. But their prices have ignited an outcry. One drug, Sovaldi, has a list price of \$84,000 for a typical 12-week course of therapy, or \$1,000 per daily pill. The newer Harvoni costs \$94,500 for 12 weeks. Gilead says the prices reflect the value the drugs bring to patients and the health care system. But

some health plans, state Medicaid programs and prison systems say the drugs are busting their budgets. Many have been limiting treatment to only the sickest patients. Congress has investigated the prices, and Philadelphia's transit authority sued Gilead this month, saying its "price-gouging" violated antitrust laws. Express Scripts has been one of the loudest complainers, with Miller even calling himself the "chief

whining officer." He has threatened to boycott Gilead's drugs once alternatives were available and now seems to be doing just that. Initial hopes that AbbVie would compete on price seemed to be dashed Friday, when Viekira Pak won approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. AbbVie set the price at \$83,319 for the typical 12-week course, not a huge discount to Harvoni. □

Putin's Bubble Bursts



PAUL KRUGMAN

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If you're the type who finds macho posturing impressive, Vladimir Putin is your kind of guy. Sure enough, many American conservatives seem to have an embarrassing crush on the swaggering strongman. "That is what you call a leader," enthused Rudy Giuliani, the former New York mayor, after Putin invaded Ukraine without debate or deliberation.

But Putin never had the resources to back his swagger. Russia has an economy roughly the same size as Brazil's. And, as we're now seeing, it's highly vulnerable to financial crisis - a vulnerability that has a lot to do with the nature of the Putin regime.

For those who haven't been keeping track: The ruble has been sliding gradually since August, when Putin openly committed Russian troops to the conflict in Ukraine. A few weeks ago, however, the slide turned into a plunge. Extreme measures, including a huge rise in interest rates and pressure on private companies to stop holding dollars, have done no more than stabilize the ruble far below its previous level. And all indications are that the Russian economy is heading for a nasty recession.

The proximate cause of Russia's difficulties is, of course, the global plunge in oil prices, which, in turn, reflects factors - growing production from shale, weakening demand from China and other economies - that have nothing to do with Putin. And this was bound to inflict serious damage on an economy that, as I said, doesn't have much besides oil that the rest of the world wants; the sanctions imposed on Russia over the Ukraine conflict have added to the damage.

But Russia's difficulties are disproportionate to the size of the shock: While oil has indeed plunged, the ruble has plunged even more, and the damage to the Russian economy reaches far beyond the oil sector. Why?

Actually, it's not a puzzle - and this is, in fact, a movie currency-crisis aficionados like yours truly have seen many times before: Argentina 2002, Indonesia 1998, Mexico 1995, Chile 1982, the list goes on. The kind of crisis Russia now faces is what you get when bad things happen to an economy made vulnerable by large-scale borrowing from abroad - specifically, large-scale

borrowing by the private sector, with the debts denominated in foreign currency, not the currency of the debtor country. In that situation, an adverse shock like a fall in exports can start a vicious downward spiral. When the nation's currency falls, the balance sheets of local businesses - which have assets in rubles (or pesos or rupiah) but debts in dollars or euros - implode. This, in turn, inflicts severe damage on the domestic economy, undermining confidence and depressing the currency even more. And Russia fits the standard playbook. Except for one thing. Usually, the way a country ends up with a lot of foreign debt is by running trade deficits, using borrowed funds to pay for imports. But Russia hasn't run trade deficits. On the contrary, it has consistently run large trade surpluses, thanks to high oil prices. So why did it borrow so much money, and where did the money go?

Well, you can answer the second question by walking around Mayfair in London, or (to a lesser extent) Manhattan's Upper East Side, especially in the evening, and observing the long rows of luxury residences with no lights on - residences owned, as the line goes, by Chinese princelings, Middle Eastern sheiks, and Russian oligarchs. Basically, Russia's elite has been accumulating assets outside the country - luxury real estate is only the most visible example - and the flip side of that accumulation has been rising debt at home.

Where does the elite get that kind of money? The answer, of course, is that Putin's Russia is an extreme version of crony capitalism, indeed, a kleptocracy in which loyalists get to skim off vast sums for their personal use. It all looked sustainable as long as oil prices stayed high. But now the bubble has burst, and the very corruption that sustained the Putin regime has left Russia in dire straits. How does it end? The standard response of a country in Russia's situation is an International Monetary Fund program that includes emergency loans and forbearance from creditors in return for reform.

Obviously that's not going to happen here, and Russia will try to muddle through on its own, among other things with rules to prevent capital from fleeing the country - a classic case of locking the barn door after the oligarch is gone. It's quite a comedown for Putin. And his swaggering strongman act helped set the stage for the disaster.

A more open, accountable regime - one that wouldn't have impressed Giuliani so much - would have been less corrupt, would probably have run up less debt, and would have been better placed to ride out falling oil prices. Macho posturing, it turns out, makes for bad economies. □



The U.S. will restore relations with Cuba

This Israeli Election Matters



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

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Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu has set new elections in Israel for March 17. Israel has had critical elections before, but this could be its most important, because the Israeli right today is no longer dominated by security hawks and free-marketeers like Netanyahu. It is dominated by West Bank settlers and scary religious-nationalist zealots like Naftali Bennett, who, if they run the next government and effectively annex the West Bank, will lead Israel into a dark corner, increasingly alienated from Europe, America and the next generation of American Jews.

At the same time, the neighborhood Israel lives in has never been so full of threats. If the Israeli center-left and center-right want to avoid the South African future that the Israeli far-right is offering them, then they have to create a coalition that can convince the Israeli silent majority that they understand, and can blunt, those threats - and allow Israel to securely withdraw from most of the West Bank, either in a negotiated deal with the Palestinians or unilaterally.

"The importance of the 2015 election cannot be too highly emphasized," Ari Shavit, the Haaretz columnist wrote last week. "This time the question isn't about the price of an apartment or cottage (cheese), but whether there will be a home for us at all. This time the struggle isn't about convenience but about the core of our existence. Because this time the forces threatening Israeli democracy and the Zionist enterprise from within are

unprecedented in their power."

So how might the Israeli center contest this foundational election? The best approach I've heard comes from Amos Yadlin, Israel's former chief of defense intelligence, and the pilot who dropped the bomb through the roof of Saddam Hussein's nuclear reactor. Yadlin, who now directs Israel's Institute for National Security Studies, argued to me that Israel's center needs to run on the core values of its founding prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. That is an Israel, he said, "that understands the limits of power of a small country," and is focused solely on building "a state that has a Jewish majority, a state that is democratic where all citizens are equal, a state that is secure even in a threatening environment and a state whose higher moral caliber is as valued as it was in the past." And that means a state with a clear, secure border with its Palestinian neighbors.

Yadlin is a tough-minded analyst. He worries that the Israeli right is completely out of touch with the nation's standing in the world and the left with the dangers in the neighborhood. Although he knows that all his Ben-Gurion goals may not be achievable (and Israel may not have a Palestinian partner), he wants the next Israeli government to get caught trying - and trying again - to achieve them. What distinguishes him from Netanyahu and the Israeli right is that Yadlin is not looking for excuses to say that Israel has no negotiating partner, the way Netanyahu did out of fear that genuine negotiations about borders would blow up his right-wing ruling coalition, or the way the Jewish settlers do, because they know genuine negotiations would blow up their messianic vision for forever controlling the West Bank.

Yadlin says he wants the next Israeli government to take "all of Israel's innovative spirit and brains" and apply them to "out-of-the-box thinking" to

find a secure way forward. He sketched three paths for me based on the Israeli-designed traffic management application Waze.com. "As with Waze, if one route is blocked, one recalibrates and chooses a different route to the same destination," Yadlin said. "We propose: the bilateral negotiations route; the Arab Peace Initiative route; and the independent route."

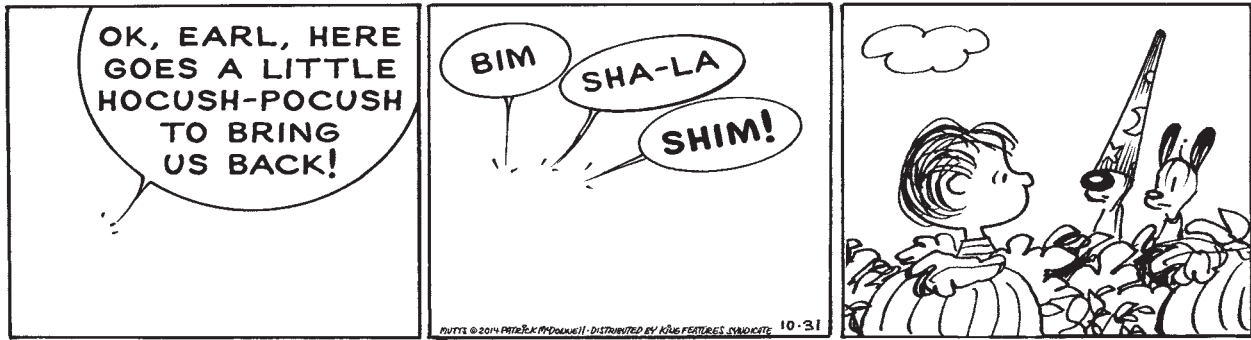
The preferred route, Yadlin argues, "is that of bilateral negotiations with the Palestinians to reach a permanent agreement. If this track is impossible, as was proved in 2013-14, then it is time to move to the second route, that of a revised Arab Peace Initiative."

Try to leverage the willingness of Arab states to normalize relations with Israel if it reaches a deal with the Palestinians. The more the Arab states put on the table, the more Palestinians can, in effect, offer Israel and the more cover Palestinians will have for concessions they will have to make.

"If this route, too, proves to be blocked," he said, "we must move to an independent track that will ensure that the viable two-state solution is kept. Israel will deploy along borders that guarantee a Jewish majority and a secure state."

Netanyahu will still be a formidable candidate, but, interestingly, his popularity plummeted when he called for new elections. I know why: Israelis, though dubious about Palestinian intentions and terrified of their region, are tired of a leader who keeps telling them: there is no exit, everyone hates us and the future will be full of yesterdays. In a country whose national anthem is "Hatikvah" - "The Hope" - the prime minister came to symbolize the opposite to many Israelis, who still want someone with the attributes of Ben-Gurion to test and retest whether hope is possible. The Israeli candidate or party that understands that will have a great chance of winning. □

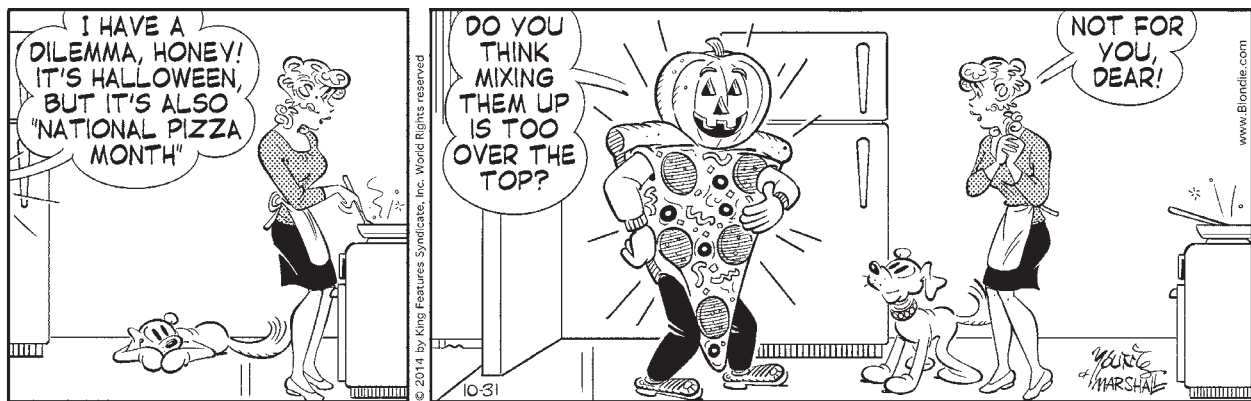
Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



Reviving beloved tradition set to instill Christmas fear

MELISSA EDDY

© 2014 New York Times

MUNICH - Long before parents relied on the powers of Santa Claus to monitor their children's behavior, their counterparts in Alpine villages called on a shaggy-furred, horned creature with a fistful of bound twigs to send the message that they had better watch out. Tom Bierbaumer recalls the trepidation he felt every Dec. 6, when the clanging of oversized cowbells signaled the arrival of the Krampus, a devilish mountain goblin who serves as an evil counterpart to the good St. Nick. He would think back over his misdeeds of past months - the days he had refused to clear the supper table, left

his homework unfinished or pulled a girl's hair.

"When you are a child, you know what you have done wrong the whole year," said Bierbaumer, who grew up in the Bavarian Alps and now heads a Munich-based club, the Sparifankerl Pass - Bavarian dialect for "Devil's Group" - devoted to keeping the Krampus tradition alive. "When the Krampus comes to your house, and you are a child, you are really worried about getting a hit from his switch."

Besides visiting homes with St. Nicholas, the Krampus has for centuries run through village and town centers spreading pre-Christmas fear and chasing away evil spirits. □

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24/7

EPA coal ash standards a setback for environmental groups

By DYLAN LOVAN,
TRAVIS LOLLER
and DINA CAPIELLO
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) --

Six years ago, there was a massive spill of coal ash sludge in Tennessee. Three years later, tons of coal ash swept into Lake Michigan. Last February, there was another spill and gray sludge spewed into the Dan River in North Carolina. With each disaster, environmentalists sounded alarms and called for the byproduct of burning coal to be treated as hazardous waste. On Friday, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released the first standards for the coal-burning waste, but they were hardly what environmental groups were hoping for.

The EPA ruled that the ash can be treated like regular garbage, meaning regulating the stuff will be left up to states and watchful citizens.

"We had to go to court to force EPA to issue this first-ever coal ash rule, and unfortunately, we will be back in court to force coal plants to clean up their ash dumps and start disposing of their toxic waste safely," said EarthJustice attorney Lisa Evans.

Added Scott Slesinger of the Natural Resources Defense Council: "Unlike the majority of environmental standards - which are backstopped by federal enforcement - this rule all but leaves people who live near coal ash dumps to fend for themselves."

The coal industry supported the less strict classification, arguing that the ash wasn't dangerous, and that a hazardous label would hinder the ash recycling market. About 40 percent of coal ash is reused, in products such as cement.



In this Monday, Dec. 29, 2008 file image provided by Greenpeace, coal ash slurry left behind in a containment pond near the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston Fossil Plant is shown in Harriman, Tenn., after the dyke at left broke Dec. 22, 2008.

Associated Press

In Tennessee, the spill happened when a containment dike burst at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston Fossil Plant, releasing more than 5 million cubic yards of ash from a storage pond. The sludge flowed into a river and spoiled hundreds of acres in a riverside community 35 miles west of Knoxville.

A couple of dozen families used to live on a peninsula near the plant, but now the sole resident is Tommy Charles and his wife.

Charles said on the night of the rupture, he was awakened by a phone call from a friend who was checking on them.

He took a flashlight and went outside. "I didn't know what I was seeing," he said Friday. "It was just a mess of goo."

The Tennessee Valley Authority is spending \$1.2 bil-

lion to clean up the mess. Since the December 2008 disaster, the EPA has documented 132 cases in which coal-fired power plant waste damaged rivers, streams and lakes, and 123 where it has tainted underground water sources, in many cases legally.

The EPA said the steps they were taking would protect communities from the risks associated with coal ash waste sites and hold the companies operating them accountable.

"It does what we hoped to accomplish ... in a very aggressive but reasonable and pragmatic way," EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy said.

The rules will increase monitoring for leaks and control blowing dust, and require companies to make testing results public. They also set standards for closing waste

sites, and require those that are structurally deficient or tainting waterways to close.

The new rules apply to closed coal ash ponds at sites where utilities still have active operations, such as the Duke Energy plant in Eden, North Carolina, where the sudden collapse of a drainage pipe triggered a massive spill in February that coated 70 miles of the Dan River in gray sludge. Duke was operating a new natural gas plant on the property at the time of the spill, and no longer creating coal waste.

Prior to the spill, tests showed it was among 32 unlined pits being operated by the company in the state and tainting groundwater in violation of state standards. The new rule requires new waste pits to be lined.

The regulations do not cover sites at shuttered power plants. And in some cases, they would allow existing landfills that do not meet the new standards to continue to operate.

State officials were still interpreting the new rules.

Tony Hatton, Kentucky's solid waste division director, said it's still unclear how long states have to draft their own plans following the EPA guidelines. He said utilities in Kentucky have been moving away from "wet-handling" of the ash in recent years, where the waste is stored in ponds and instead dumping it in dry landfills.

With a dry landfill "you're less likely to get into compliance problems from a groundwater perspective and it's a lot more protective of groundwater," Hatton said.

Angelina Jolie's latest incarnation: filmmaker

JAKE COYLE
AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In a life that has been notable for its many metamorphoses — screen starlet, Goth vixen, United Nations ambassador, mother of six, breast cancer awareness advocate — Angelina Jolie's latest incarnation is as filmmaker.

Rarely has an actor, particularly of Jolie's stature, so fully given over to the other side of the camera. On Thursday, she'll release her second directorial effort, the inspirational World War II survival tale "Unbroken," which follows her Bosnian War drama "In the Land of Blood and Honey." She has already shot her next movie (an intimate marriage drama in which she also co-stars with her husband, Brad Pitt), and made plans for her fourth film, "Africa," about elephant poaching. Meanwhile, she's virtually disappeared from the screen, starring in only one live-action film ("Maleficent") in the last four years. The transformation is complete, even if the new title gives her some hesitation. "I'm shy to call myself a di-



In this image released by Universal Pictures, director Angelina Jolie appears on the set of "Unbroken." Associated Press

rector still. When someone says, 'What do you do for a living?' I don't know if I've earned that," Jolie said in a pair of recent interviews, one in a Manhattan hotel, the other by phone. "I do love directing. I much prefer it to acting." It's admittedly unlikely that Jolie is beset by que-

ries about her occupation ("And this Mr. Pitt, is he in show business as well?"). But if there were any doubt, the scope of "Unbroken" — a classical epic that spans war and sea, a prestige picture with major below-the-line talent, a Christmas Day release amid awards season —

certainly makes clear Jolie's ambition.

"If you would have said to me a few years ago, 'What kind of film are you looking for?' I would have never said a film with shark attacks and bombing raids and the Olympics," says Jolie. "I would have picked something very in-

timate and character driven. But I fell in love with this story."

The story is of Louis Zamperini, who before enlisting in the Air Force to fight in World War II was a track star who ran in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. During the war, his B-24 bomber crashed in the Pacific. He and two crewmates survived on a raft at sea for 47 days, only to be captured by the Japanese and put into a brutal prisoner-of-war camp. Zamperini's incredible life was chronicled in a 2010 best-seller by Laura Hillenbrand, though his tale had been kicking around in Hollywood since 1956, when Universal Pictures bought the rights to Zamperini's memoir with plans for Tony Curtis to star in the film. "If it was a hot property, I wouldn't have had a chance, to be honest," says Jolie, who had to convince Universal that she could handle a much larger project than the independent "In the Land of Blood and Honey." But she was deeply moved by the script (later to be rewritten by the Coen brothers) and Hillenbrand's book. □

British singer Joe Cocker dies of lung cancer

DAVID BAUDER
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — British singer Joe Cocker, whose had hits that included "You Are So Beautiful" and "Up Where We Belong," and a contortionist style of performance memorably parodied by John Belushi on "Saturday Night Live," has died. He was 70.

His London-based agent, Barrie Marshall, said Cocker died Monday of lung cancer in Colorado, where he has lived for the past two decades.

Cocker, a song interpreter more than a songwriter, first became known through his hit cover of the Beatles' "With a Little Help From My Friends," and a characteristically manic performance at the first

Woodstock festival in 1969. His raucous "Mad Dogs & Englishmen" tour of 1970 produced a film and a recording that went gold. He had a top 10 hit in 1975 on the aching ballad "You Are So Beautiful," with his voice cracking on the final emotional note and won his first Grammy Award in 1983 for his "Up Where We Belong" duet with Jennifer Warnes, which was the theme of the movie "An Officer and a Gentleman." Cocker, who received an Order of the British Empire in 2011 for his contribution to music, released 40 albums and continued to tour after the hits dried up. He was known for an intense, twitchy stage presence where his arms would flail and face contort as he

wrung notes from his raspy voice. When he performed on "Saturday Night Live" in 1976, Belushi parodied him onstage, exaggerating his movements by flipping to the ground. It was a clip seen as widely as Cocker's own performances.

Years later, Cocker told The Associated Press' Mary Campbell that he was playing an imaginary piano and air guitar while singing — the elements that contributed to this unique style.

"That was the frustration of not being able to play, really," he said.

Cocker moved to Crawford, Colorado, a town of fewer than 500 people, in the early 1990s. He and his wife, Pam, ran a children's educational foundation —



In this Aug. 5, 2011 file photo, British singer Joe Cocker sings the "Red Cross Gala" in Monaco. Associated Press

the Cocker Kids Foundation — that raised funds for the town and schools, and ran the Mad Dog Cafe for several years in town, said Tom Wills, publisher of The North Fork Merchant Herald, a local community newspaper.

Wills said Cocker bought about 40 acres of property and built a hillside mansion — which he called Mad

Dog Ranch — when he moved to Colorado.

A group of Cocker's friends gathered Monday at community radio station KVNF to play Cocker's songs.

"He had a long battle with cancer. We're trying to do a little tribute for him," said Bob Pennetta, a real estate agent and board member of the Cocker Kids Foundation. □

Good news from Tom Brokaw: His cancer is in remission

FRAZIER MOORE

AP Television Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tom Brokaw says his cancer is in remission.

The veteran NBC newsmen announced Sunday that, after months of chemotherapy, he soon will begin a drug maintenance program.

Sharing with colleagues what he called "very encouraging news," Brokaw's internal memo noted that a year ago his future was "more uncertain than I cared to acknowledge."

Last February, he revealed that six months earlier he had been diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a cancer affecting blood cells in the bone marrow, and was undergoing treatment.

He called the past year "a challenge," but added gratefully he met it in "world-class hospitals with brilliant

physicians."

The former NBC "Nightly News" anchor, now a special correspondent, has continued to work on projects during his treatment, including participation in last month's election night coverage. Also in November, he took NBC Sports Network viewers on a trip to his native South Dakota for pheasant hunting season.

Brokaw, 74, began his career with NBC News in its Los Angeles bureau in 1966, later serving as its White House correspondent during the Watergate scandal before becoming anchor in 1983. Brian Williams replaced him as anchor in 2004.

Brokaw is the author of several books including "The Greatest Generation," his celebration of Americans who endured the Great Depression and World War II. □

China indicts Jackie Chan's son on drug charge

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese prosecutors on Monday indicted the son of Hong Kong action film star Jackie Chan on the charge of sheltering others to use drugs, more than four months after he was detained. If convicted, singer-actor Jaycee Chan could be jailed for up to three years. Chan, 32, was among a string of celebrities detained over the summer for vices such as drug use and hiring prostitutes, as Beijing vowed to clean up social morals. Chan's case has been particularly embarrassing for his more famous father, who was named by Beijing as an anti-drug ambassador in 2009. Beijing police detained the younger Chan at his Beijing apartment in August along with Taiwanese movie star Ko Kai. Police said Chan and Ko both tested positive for marijuana and admitted using the drug, and that 100 grams (3.5 ounces) of it were taken from Chan's home.

Ko, whose real name is Ko Chen-tung, was released after a 14-day administrative detention for the drug



In this March 31, 2011 photo, Hong Kong actor Jaycee Chan speaks during an awards ceremony for the Chinese entertainment industry in Beijing, China.

Associated Press

use, but Chan — who has remained in detention since August — is faced with the more serious criminal charge. State broadcaster CCTV in August aired video of the police raid on Chan's apartment, in which Chan was shown identifying marijuana. Ko testified on camera that he had used drugs at Chan's home. □

South Africa's high crime rate inspires novelist



In this photo taken Monday Nov. 24, 2014, author Angela Makholwa speaks during an interview with The Associated Press in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Associated Press

LYNSEY CHUTEL

Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Novelist Angela Makholwa's fascination with South Africa's violent crime has made her one of the country's most popular writers. Using sharply drawn characters and intriguing plots, Makholwa's fiction helps South Africans to make sense of the country's high crime rate. A mother of two who runs a public relations firm, Makholwa said she is inspired by the discomfort caused by crime.

"It's a permanent fixture of our lives. It's almost part of the fabric of what it is to be a South African," she said. "It's hard for me to write an idealized version of what it's like to live in Johannesburg or South Africa."

While working as a writer at a glossy magazine, Makholwa became fascinated by the case of a serial killer. For about a year, she interviewed the convict serving 2,410 years in a maximum security prison in Pretoria for the murder and rape of dozens of women. He was courteous, almost sweet, when talking about his life, she said.

The experience led to her first book, "Red Ink," the

story of a young journalist telling the story of a serial killer, who unwittingly finds herself at the center of a murder plot.

Her next novel, "The Thirtieth Candle" traced the anxiety of four suburban South African women as they approached their 30th birthdays.

It was her third and most successful book that established Makholwa as a top crime writer. "Black Widow Society" tells the story of a covert cabal of powerful women who assassinate their abusive and wayward husbands.

She knew she got the story right when her own husband, a lawyer, said he was disturbed but entertained by her first draft, said Makholwa.

"Angela has a unique way of capturing modern South African society and in 'Black Widow Society' the tables turn and women take control," said Terry Morris, managing director of Pan Macmillan, Makholwa's publisher.

Makholwa, a survivor of domestic violence in an earlier relationship, often explores gender disparities in her books. Her sophisticated and conniving her-

oines serve as a catharsis for her own experiences and subvert a genre that usually portrays women as victims.

Makholwa's characters are snappy and her descriptions of urban South Africa are vivid, say critics. Makholwa has sold thousands of books and has a loyal following. In South Africa, the sale of 2,000 books is considered a best seller. The 38-year-old will not be "burdened" by the idea that she may be portraying an image of a crime-ridden country, she says it would be a "false picture" if a new generation of South African writers ignored crime.

Between April 2013 and March 2014 South Africa recorded 17,068 murders in a population of about 50 million, according to the South African police.

"Some of the crimes that happen here are sometimes so heinous that we're at a loss of how to process them," says Mary Corrigan, a book critic. "It keeps happening and we don't really understand why. The novel presents a space for writers to try and process crime in this country — this terrible phenomenon that holds our society to ransom."

In recent years, crime fiction has become an increasingly popular genre among South African authors and readers, and Corrigan says a common theme of disillusionment and corruption across South African crime fiction paints a "bleak view of society." "Because the authority figures are corrupt, there's no real redemption," she says. "There's a lingering sense of disorder and chaos." South Africa's fiction has historically been dominated by an image of a country gripped by racial segregation and conflict, and Makholwa said she is excited to be among a new generation of writers exploring a fresh story for an audience looking for entertainment, not only searching for a message about the past. □

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